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OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
SIXTY-SEVENTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2017 - 2019

COMPRISING PERIOD
02 July 2018—12 July 2018
HER MAJESTY’S GOVERNMENT

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(FORMED BY THE RT HON. THERESA MAY, MP, JUNE 2017)

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2 July 2018
House of Commons

Monday 2 July 2018

The House met at half-past Two o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Universal Credit: Vulnerable Claimants

1. Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What recent steps the Government has taken to protect the welfare of vulnerable universal credit claimants. [906155]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Universal credit is a person-centred benefit focused on the needs of the individual. We are working continuously with a variety of stakeholders to ensure that we provide the right support for vulnerable claimants, and our work coaches undertake awareness training to identify claimants with complex needs.

Paul Masterton: During a recent visit with the Secretary of State to the Barrhead jobcentre in my constituency, one of the things we discussed with staff was the payment of advances as a single payment potentially to claimants who have difficulty managing budgets or who are struggling with addiction. Will she take into account those concerns when reviewing how the advance system is operating?

Ms McVey: I was delighted to visit my hon. Friend’s constituency and local jobcentre and to visit the Greenhouse Café, which he champions and which helps vulnerable people to get closer to the workplace. On the question that he and the work coaches raised about the advance, those advances could be given up to 100%, and with the personal relationship that the work coaches have, through this training they can assess what the right needs are. That is the right thing to do.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): One of the concerns raised by the National Audit Office is that the Department does not really know who the vulnerable claimants are, and particular problems are being caused by the very long delay before people are entitled to their benefit. The right hon. Lady’s predecessor took an important step by reducing the minimum wait from six weeks to five. Will she commit to taking that further and reducing the period further still?

Ms McVey: Universal credit is all about the relationship with the work coach. They get to know their claimants and their claimants’ needs, so it is very much a tailor-made benefit. We as Ministers have always said that, should we need to adapt and change universal credit so that it best supports the individual, we will do just that. I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman welcomed the changes that we have already made.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Vulnerable claimants often consult their local citizens advice bureau. On a visit to the Chesham citizens advice bureau, staff told me that the fixed-term, timed appointments for their clients are often taken up by them hanging on to the DWP telephone line for up to 25 or 30 minutes, and then the time for the appointment has expired. Will the Secretary of State look at the telephone line and try to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, so that CAB advisers can instantly access the advice that they need to help these clients to make universal credit go smoothly?

Ms McVey: My right hon. Friend, who does so much for people in her constituency, and particularly those with autism, raises a very good point. We will look into
exactly what we can do to do that for the citizens advice bureaux, as we have a very good working relationship with them.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The National Audit Office’s report on universal credit shows that people such as carers, families needing support with childcare and disabled people are more likely to have to wait for an initial payment. The report shows that, in December 2017, only a third of disabled people were receiving their initial payments in full and on time. As the Secretary of State claims that the NAO report is out of date, can she tell us what the figure is now?

Ms McVey: As we said quite clearly, the NAO did not take into consideration all the changes that we had made and their impact. What we can say is that we know that 80% of people will get their payment on time and in full, but what the NAO report has not taken into consideration is that 90% will get some payment within the first month and it is invariably down to non-verification and not fulfilling their claimant commitment.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): On Thursday, our concerns became a reality, as we discovered from the Government’s figures that 190 women were put in the impossible position of declaring that their child was born as a result of rape in order to receive universal credit or child tax credits. We can also estimate from those figures that around 200,000 children have been affected by the two-child cap. How does she feel about cutting that money and stopping it being spent on up to 250,000 children?

Ms McVey: This whole House voted for the changes to tax credits so that we can make sure that people in work are treated the same way as people on benefits. However, what we did do was bring in a set of exemptions for people who would not be able to have those two children. It is only right that we have brought in specific exemptions to help those people who need them.

Neil Gray: The Government continue to mislead. We know from the figures that 59% of all those households impacted are already in work. The Secretary of State continues to suggest today that this was about making the choices the same for those who are in and out of work, but actually it is about the Government making people’s choices for them. What advice does she have for a woman who is in work and in receipt of tax credits or universal credit and who has fallen, unexpectedly pregnant with what would be a third child?

Ms McVey: The hon. Gentleman will know that we still pay child benefit for all children. We are also paying childcare costs. In fact, those have increased. As I said, what we have done with tax credits is make sure that people who are paying their way and are not dependent on the state get the same support as those people who are also getting support from the state.

PIP Assessments: Appeals

2. Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): What recent estimate she has made of the average number of personal independence payment assessments that are overturned on appeal; and what the average waiting time is for such appeals to be heard.

Sarah Newton: It is not necessarily the case that the decision made was the wrong decision; mostly what happens is that more information comes forward at the appeal. Hon. Members should look at the data I have already given. One wrong decision is one too many, however, which is why we have done a great deal of work to improve our decision-making process.

Stephen Doughty: Far too many of my constituents face exactly the same situation, and far too many have found they get no points in their assessment despite being severely disabled and having previously been awarded for conditions such as multiple sclerosis, post-traumatic stress disorder and severe anxiety. Does the Minister agree with a constituent of mine who wrote to me last week and described the Department for Work and Pensions and Capita as “so robotic, intransigent and hard-nosed, it’s hard to comprehend why they were constructed that way given the purpose for which they were intended”?

Sarah Newton: I respectfully point out to the hon. Gentleman that more people are receiving higher awards on PIP than did on the legacy benefit, disability living allowance, and people moving from DLA to PIP remain in payment while going through the process. I utterly refute what he said.

Stephen Doughty: What about my constituent?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Gentleman wants to talk about constituents. I was on “You and Yours” last week and, during the phone-in, a whole series of people called in about their PIP experiences. As he has made his point, let us hear what Jennifer from Lancashire said:

“As it happens, it has worked very well for me.”

She contacted the Royal National Institute of Blind People, which helped her fill in the form, and the “result was I now get the top rate for both things…. I get £140 whereas I used to get £112.”

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I especially welcome the fact that the Government have accepted the Select Committee on Work and Pensions
recommendation to record PIP interviews. Will the Minister set out for the House the sort of timescale in which we can expect these changes to come through?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution today and the hard work he puts in on the Select Committee. I was delighted to welcome its recommendations, and I really believe that the video-recording of PIP assessments will reduce a lot of stress and anxiety, which largely occurs because of the scaremongering we see too often from the Opposition. We have begun work on the piloting and will be undertaking the testing this summer.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): At a recent Westminster Hall debate, several of us commented on how the PIP process had improved. Will the Minister continue to work with those of us who have suggestions for improving the system still further?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I am utterly determined to ensure that everyone has a very good experience of PIP. The independent customer satisfaction ratings show that the vast majority of people feel that they are treated with respect and dignity and receive the benefit to which they are entitled, but we will of course seek continuously to improve the process.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): My constituent in Normanton lost her Motability car because the DWP said that she was not entitled to it. Five weeks later it reversed the decision but, in the meantime, because my constituent was isolated, she was forced to spend thousands of pounds of her own savings on replacing the car so that she was not stuck. She has been denied any help since. Will the Minister look again at that case? It is outrageous that my constituent should lose all her savings because the DWP screwed up.

Sarah Newton: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. Of course I am always happy to meet all Members to review individual cases, but I suggest, for everyone’s benefit, that any Member with a constituent who faces losing a Motability car should call Motability. Motability is sitting on very considerable reserves. It is a charity and is able to make discretionary payments to enable people to keep their cars during the appeal process.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Thank you for calling me, Mr Speaker, and thank you for your kindness to a group of visitors who came to see me in the House earlier today.

I thank the Minister for the answers that she has given so far. I recently met representatives of Carers Aid Torbay to talk about the PIP process and the support that they provide for those who are going through it. Can she reassure me that there will be engagement with groups such as that in respect of the potential introduction of video recording of interviews?

Sarah Newton: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. It is very important for us to listen to people who are going through the process. I have regular meetings with disabled people and charities to ensure that we get it right and continuously improve the experience of our claimants.

Universal Credit: Roll-out

3. Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): What recent steps have the Government taken to ensure that universal credit is rolled out effectively. [906157]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): We are continuously testing, learning and improving to deliver an effective roll-out. The pace of the roll-out reflects the need to listen, respond and get it right. We have rolled out universal credit to 353 jobcentres and are increasing the roll-out to 60 jobcentres per month. Universal credit is on track to be in all jobcentres nationally by the end of 2018.

Peter Heaton-Jones: This Wednesday sees the roll-out of full-service universal credit in North Devon. Will the Secretary of State join me in acknowledging the hard work of Jobcentre Plus staff in ensuring the smoothest possible transition for all claimants?

Ms McVey: I will indeed join my hon. Friend in thanking him. I also thank him for what he has personally done in his local area, working with Alex Coull, the work coach team leader, and his team. They have done an excellent job, engaging with stakeholders from North Devon Homes, North Devon Council, Citizens Advice Devon and North Devon+. That is the sort of work that all Members of Parliament can do to ensure that universal credit is rolled out safely.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): May I commend the Secretary of State and convey to her the comments of staff at a jobcentre in Redditch? People who have worked there for decades said that universal credit was the best system that they had seen for 30 years. That is because it is an individualised system based on the “test and learn” approach. What more can the Secretary of State do to ensure that that approach helps our constituents?

Ms McVey: I thank the hon. Lady for raising that case. It would be good to meet her. I have surgeries every Monday in the Tea Room, and if she would like to raise a personal case with me, I ask her please to do so. We can go through the case and see exactly what happened.

19. [906176] Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): Increasingly, my constituents are finding that elements of their benefits have been withdrawn—because there is less money in the bank—before the DWP has sent the decision letter. When they phone the helpline, they are told that, as a decision letter has not been sent, the adviser cannot discuss anything with them. A month later the letter arrives, with an explanation of their right to appeal. Will the Secretary of State put her house in order, and ensure that claimants are the first and not the last to know?

Ms McVey: I thank the hon. Lady for her question. This Wednesday sees the roll-out of universal credit. I will indeed join my hon. Friend in acknowledging the hard work of Jobcentre Plus staff in ensuring the smoothest possible transition for all claimants.

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by mistake. It is as a result of the hard work of our work coaches and the direction that is being set by the Government.

Mr Speaker: I am extraordinarily grateful to the Secretary of State, whose answers I always enjoy. The only point that I would make, gently, to colleagues on both sides of the House is that we have a lot of questions to get through, so we do need to be briefier—and that is now to be exemplified by no less a figure in the House than Mr Frank Field.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State commission a report on real-time income, which for many of our constituents provides neither real-time information nor income and results in hardship, and publish that report?

Ms McVey: The right hon. Gentleman raises a good point. We are looking constantly at real-time income—how it works and how it works best—and we continue to do that and put out new guidance when we know what is going on.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm whether universal credit is seeing more people into work sooner than jobseeker’s allowance did?

Ms McVey: Not only is it seeing more people into work sooner, but it shows they are staying in work longer and looking to do more hours. It also shows that people who are in work are earning £600 more a year on average. My hon. Friend has raised a good question.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Department for Work and Pensions’ own survey of claimants under universal credit full service found that over 40% were unable to register a claim online unassisted. These people are the most likely to be vulnerable in our society. Universal support is meant to address this, but the NAO report reveals that providers told the NAO that universal support does not meet the needs of claimants and leaves providers insufficient time to assist them. What are the Government going to do to ensure that these people receive the support they need?

Ms McVey: As the hon. Lady will know, we have provided £200 million-worth of support for local authorities to help people who will need the help not just for budgeting but for going online through IT; we have a free phone line and we meet with people face to face to do just that.

Universal Credit: Supporting People into Work

4. Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): What assessment has made of the efficacy of universal credit in supporting people into work. [906158]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): The Department published an analysis on 8 June which showed a near doubling of the proportion of UC claimants in a paid job after eight months into the claim. The Department published analysis last year which shows that UC claimants are 4 percentage points more likely to be in work than an equivalent claimant on JSA six months after their claim.

Neil Coyle: The National Audit Office reported that the Department will never be able to measure whether universal credit actually leads to more people in work because it cannot isolate the effect of UC against other economic factors. So if the Department serious in what it told the NAO about intending to evaluate specifically the impact of UC, is that evaluation under way, how many people are being evaluated and when will it report?

Alok Sharma: As the Secretary of State has said, we are at record levels of employment in this country and that is because of the policies of this Government. The hon. Gentleman talks about the 200,000 extra people who will be in work as a result of UC. He will also know that, in 2012, the Institute for Fiscal Studies looked at the methodology, which related to the key element of this, which was the financial incentives that will make more people go into work, and it concluded that this was within the plausible range.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is right that our welfare system supports those in need, but in the long term the best way out of poverty is sustainable employment?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are at record levels of employment in this country. It is interesting that the Opposition talk about estimates. If I remember correctly, back in 2010, the Opposition said we would lose 1 million jobs as a result of our policies, but we have created 3.2 million. At the end of the day, when it comes to estimates, I am not taking lectures from the Opposition.

Universal Credit: NAO Report

5. David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): What assessment she has made of the implications for her Department’s policies of the findings of the NAO report entitled rolling out universal credit, published on 15 June 2018. [906160]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): It is unfortunate that the NAO was unable to take into account the significant changes recently implemented in universal credit. Those changes address many of the concerns raised in its report. We continue to listen and learn from feedback, and make the necessary changes to the benefit as we roll it out.

David Hanson: Many of my constituents are among the one in five individuals who are not paid universal credit on time. As the Minister should know, the NAO specifically recommended that UC should not be rolled out further until the system can extend and work with the current level of applications. Will she accept that recommendation?

Ms McVey: The NAO made clear quite the opposite: it said that we need to continue with universal credit. It was also concerned that it was rolling out too slowly and said that actually we should increase what we are doing. So what the right hon. Gentleman says is absolutely not what the NAO said.
Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that more than eight in 10 claimants are satisfied with their experience of universal credit?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is right—that is exactly the number. Actually, Patrick from Newport has said that it helped him with fares to get to a job and with the cost of clothing. He said:

“Thanks for all your help. It was really easy dealing with everyone who helped me back into work quickly and helping me buy what I need and travel back and forth.”

That was an example from Wales.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The National Audit Office report recommended that the Government should

“ensure the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes”,

yet in her oral statement on 21 June, the Secretary of State said that the NAO report stated that the Government should

“continue with the roll-out and do it faster.”—[Official Report, 21 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 495.]

Will the Secretary of State tell us where in the report it says that the roll-out should be speeded up?

Ms McVey: Yes, in the report it says just that. It says that it needs to continue to go forward and it needs to continue at a faster rate.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): The NAO report acknowledged the close links between local authorities and universal credit. As one of the first full-service sites, Rugby and its borough council received an £85,000 payment to assist with the cost of digitisation. Will the Secretary of State join me in welcoming that valuable support to local authorities in full-service areas?

Ms McVey: I will indeed join my hon. Friend in praising that support. It is really important that local authorities are involved in what is happening and that we provide the right support on the ground for individuals to get their benefit.

Universal Credit: Financial Hardship

6. Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): What assessment she has made of trends in the level of financial hardship experienced by universal credit claimants. [906161]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Kit Malthouse): The best way to help people financially is to help them into work, and universal credit will get 200,000 more people into work. Our recent survey evidence shows that people on UC and in work had an average increase in reported earnings of £600 a year. There was also an 8% fall in the number of people on incomes of £10,000 a year or less.

Ruth George: The DWP’s own survey also found that after nine months on universal credit, 40% of claimants were falling behind with their bills or experiencing real financial hardship. This is a problem not of the initial waiting period but of ongoing insufficient income. The Secretary of State has tested and learned about hardship levels. How will she fix them?

Kit Malthouse: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said earlier, the close and constructive relationship between work coaches and their clients should enable them as a team to get through any hardship that arises. The hon. Lady is attempting to build a career on bashing universal credit, but she never does so in context. We have chosen to fight poverty in a different way. We have chosen to fight it with work rather than with welfare. She never points out that, under the last Labour Government, the number of households where no one worked almost doubled.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Earlier on, the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton), mentioned scaremongering by the Opposition. I can confirm that that scaremongering causes grave anxiety among my constituents. Will the Minister confirm that, for example, an advance payment does not involve rates of interest and that it is reimbursed by deductions made over a period of months?

Kit Malthouse: My hon. Friend is exactly right. I was pleased to be able to sit with him in a meeting with some of his third sector organisations, including his local food bank, his citizens advice bureau and his local refuge, to try to scotch some of the mythology that has been created around universal credit. Wherever universal credit has been in place for some time, it receives universal praise from work coaches on the frontline and very high satisfaction levels from the people who are using it.

Universal Credit: Roll-out

7. Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What progress her Department is making on the roll-out of universal credit. [906162]

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): Nearly 1 million people are now claiming universal credit, with around 37% of them in employment. We take 5,000 new claims a day and universal credit is operational in half of all jobcentres, with the full roll-out expected to be concluded by the end of the year.

Gavin Newlands: From the Government’s own business case for universal credit, it transpires that just 3% of those who have been brought into conditionality under universal credit are expected to find work, as a result of sanctions. Given that my constituents are going to suffer this roll-out in September, does he think that this is a robust business case for his Department’s punitive and callous sanctions regime?

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Enunciate, man!

Alok Sharma: The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) talks about sanctions, but he will know that the regime is different. For example, under JSA if somebody who was due to come in for an interview does not contact us after five days, they fall out of the system and are not sanctioned. Under universal credit, however, we continue to pay all the elements—the child element and the housing element—but the sanction that they would face applies only to the standard allowance. The hon. Gentleman talks about wanting to help people, but the Scottish National party
voted against £1.5 billion of support. If he wants to support people, he should try to support the Government from time to time.

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant), from a sedentary position and rather gratuitously, offered advice and exhortation to the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands). I simply say to the hon. Member for Lichfield that we can always hear him with crystal clarity. He is in no danger of not being noticed.

Michael Fabricant: Thank you.

Ruth George rose—

Mr Speaker: It is always good to hear from the hon. Lady, but we have already heard from her.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): Constituents who do not have a passport or driving licence, because they do not drive or have no need of one or cannot afford one, cannot use the online verification system, and need to be seen in person at a job centre, but there are huge waits for appointments, including for those who urgently need advance payments. What is the Minister doing to tackle that?

Alok Sharma: The hon. Lady knows that advance payments are available if they are required on the day. As for verification, there is a set of criteria that can be applied so that we do not have to go through the verification system. If the hon. Lady has specific cases, she should please bring them to me as I would be happy to look into them.

Universal Credit: Death of Applicants

8. Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): How many universal credit applicants have died during the period that their application was being assessed and as a result have received a zero payment for the days during that period when they were alive.

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): For universal credit full service, around 1,200 cases have been closed with a deceased closure reason since roll-out began in 2016, with the vast majority receiving a payment.

Ronnie Cowan: I know of cases where no universal credit payment has been received when constituents have passed away towards the end of their assessment period. Essentially, the DWP classes someone who dies at the end of an assessment period as having died at the beginning. Will the Minister address this so that bereaved families are not financially punished?

Alok Sharma: I have corresponded with the hon. Gentleman about one specific case. There are circumstances in which payment is still made after the death of a claimant and where payments have continued for two subsequent assessment periods, such as when the individual was in a couple. However, I note the hon. Gentleman’s point and will look into the policy.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): A connected problem might be that the Department does not tell people whether they are entitled to prescriptions when their UC claim is awarded. Will the Department please start doing that, because several of my constituents have been in touch in deep distress because of the fivefold fines that they have been forced to pay?

Alok Sharma: We do not want anybody to be in distress. If colleagues on either side of the House have specific cases, they should bring them to Ministers. We hear a lot of general commentary, but we would like to help individuals, so please bring us those specific cases.

Universal Credit: Claimant Satisfaction

9. Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): What assessment her Department has made of rates of universal credit claimant satisfaction.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Some 83% universal credit claimants are satisfied with the service. The claimant survey shows that the majority of people find interactions with their work coach, both online and in person, to be helpful and that the online journal is easy to use.

Giles Watling: With universal credit due to be rolled out in Clacton later this month, will my right hon. Friend reassure me that, with recent changes to the system, my residents will get a better service?

Ms McVey: I want to recognise all the hard work that my hon. Friend does in his constituency. Yes, his constituents will get a better service now that we have added those changes. However, he does not have to take my words for it. Chloe, a lone parent, said: “Universal credit is easier than the old system, and it has helped me to get a job. It is simpler, as I do not have to keep putting my wage slips in. I can actually vary my wages and get paid automatically.”

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State looked into the level of satisfaction of people on the autism spectrum and of those facing similar challenges? Her Department’s offices around the country are very autism-unfriendly and difficult places for people on the autism spectrum to approach. When will her Department have a policy for autistic people?

Ms McVey: I share the hon. Gentleman’s concern for young people, or anybody, with autism. This is something that we, as a country, have to get right, as we are seeing a rising number of people with autism. Both sides of the House work very closely on this, whether it is my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work or Opposition Members.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I think we must have a dose of Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What is the impact on housing association tenants?

Ms McVey: My right hon. Friend asks a rather open question but we have a landlord portal for housing association tenants. If people need their payments done automatically, they can have just that—if that is what he is referring to.
Mr Speaker: Well, the Secretary of State had a stab at it, and we are extremely grateful to her for doing so.

Supporting People with Disabilities and Health Conditions

10. Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): How much her Department has spent on supporting people with disabilities and health conditions in the last 12 months; and what the change in that amount has been in real terms since 2010.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): In 2017-18, the Department for Work and Pensions spent £51.9 billion on benefits to support disabled people and people with health conditions. This year it is forecast to rise to £54 billion, £9.3 billion more in real terms than in 2010-11. Spending on the main disability benefits—PIP, DLA and attendance allowance—has risen by over £5 billion since 2010 and is at a record high this year.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Minister for her answer. Will she join me in congratulating the East Cleveland employment and training hub in Skinningrove, which opened in February and has done brilliant work for a number of my constituents, including those with the health and disability issues to which my question refers?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend is a real champion for all his constituents, and I am pleased to join him in praising the work of the East Cleveland employment and training hub, which I understand plays a pivotal role in the community in enabling people to be supported into employment and is particularly valuable for those people who recently lost their jobs at the local potash mine.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): My constituent Alexandra Mitchell is unable to walk without heavy metal callipers. She cannot use her feet to drive and has hand controls in the Motability car she now stands to lose because her PIP assessment says that if she can drive, she must be able to walk. Does the Minister accept that this example, and those we have heard from other hon. Members, calls into question the quality of PIP assessments? Does she accept that the system is flawed and needs to be sorted?

Sarah Newton: One experience of poor customer service is one too many, and of course I will meet her.

I also want to point out what Kate from the west midlands said, again on “You and Yours”: “My 35-year-old daughter has a learning disability. She doesn’t read or write, so I filled in the form for her. From her point of view, it turned out to be a very good experience because when she was on DLA she was on the lower rate but, because of the new criteria, she is now on the higher rate and has a mobility car. So from our point of view, it’s been really positive.”

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities carried out a robust inquiry into the effects of the Government’s policies, including social security, on disabled people. It found “grave and systematic violations” of disabled people’s rights. The Minister recently said that she is “utterly committed to the convention.”—[Official Report, 20 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 124WH.]

When the Government respond to the report later this summer, will she finally commit to carrying out a cumulative impact assessment of the Government’s policies, as recommended by the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

Sarah Newton: We were very disappointed that, when it came to the UK, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities did not take into consideration the great deal of evidence that was provided. When I make my very full response, I am sure I will set the record straight so that the committee understands that we are very proud to be a world-leading country in supporting people with disabilities to fulfil their potential in society.

Of course we are always determined to do more, and we do an equality impact assessment every single time there is any sort of policy change.

Marsha De Cordova: We know an impact assessment of the social security policies can be carried out, because the Equality and Human Rights Commission has done so. Is it not the truth that the Government will not do this because they are afraid that an impact assessment will confirm what the UN, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and disabled people say, which is that this Government’s policies have created a hostile environment that is causing grave violations against disabled people?

Sarah Newton: I can assure the hon. Lady that that is simply not the case. We have very strong protections for people with disabilities in our country, not the least of which is the Equality Act 2010. I make sure that impact assessments are done on all policies that are undertaken.

I honestly ask all Opposition Members not to use this language of “a hostile environment”, as it is simply not the case and as the very people who need all of our support are put off seeking it and coming forward. I ask Opposition Members to stop saying things they know are not true.

Employment: People with Family Responsibilities

11. Mary Robinson (Chedle) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to improve employment opportunities for people with family responsibilities.

Sarah Newton: I can assure the hon. Member that we do an equality impact assessment every single time there is any sort of policy change.

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simplifying and smoothing their transition into the workplace—with UC work will always pay. Furthermore, the Government now provide more support than ever before to help parents with the costs of childcare; under UC people can now claim 85% of their costs, which compares with 70% under tax credits.

**Mary Robinson:** Will my hon. Friend join me in welcoming the figures from the House of Commons Library showing that since 2010 the number of children living in workless households in Greater Manchester has fallen by 7.2%? Does he agree that that is in no small part thanks to the record number of jobs created by this Government?

**Kit Malthouse:** It will not surprise Members to know that I am more than happy to celebrate the results of that research and to thank my hon. Friend. Friend for the work she does in her constituency in promoting this, not least in being a champion for Manchester airport, where thousands of her constituents work, and where there is a strong capacity for growth and yet more jobs.

**Mr Speaker:** Enunciation from Lichfield—Mr Michael Fabricant.

**Michael Fabricant:** I will be very precise, Mr Speaker. Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to getting people out of poverty is work? Given that this Government have created 1,000 new jobs every single day since 2010, we have produced the key to unlock that door.

**Kit Malthouse:** My hon. Friend has absolutely put his finger on the button. As I said in an earlier answer, in this country we have tried fighting poverty with welfare in the past and failed. The Labour Government spent some £150 billion on tax credits and hardly moved the poverty indicators at all. We have chosen the route of work as the way to human dignity, prosperity and control for people and their families. I celebrate with him the success of the entire country, and not least his constituency.

**Damien Moore:** By delivering record numbers of jobs, reducing taxes, increasing childcare provision and raising wages, does my hon. Friend agree that it is this Conservative Government who are delivering for families?

**Kit Malthouse:** We are indeed delivering for families. I know it is a joy to many in this House to hear a voice of optimism from Southport at last, from a new Member who works closely with his local business community, recommending that its prosperity lies at the heart of that of many of his constituents. We know that outcomes for children, in particular, are significantly improved if the adults in the household are working and that children in workless families are more than twice as likely to fail to achieve at school.

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): Ministers will know from the experience of women born in the 1950s that giving people advance notice of changes means they have time to plan. Given that in 2019 families in work with more than two children are set to lose their universal credit support for their third child, what steps is the Department taking to let people know in advance so that they have time to plan?

**Kit Malthouse:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are no cash losers from this policy: anybody who has an existing third child will continue to retain their support, and that will be preserved as they transition on to UC; we will continue to pay child benefit, no matter the number of children; and of course there will be significant childcare assistance for those who move on to UC.

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is it not the case that universal credit claimants with family responsibilities could face a sanction for refusing a job offer with a zero-hours contract? Is it not also the case that the Government are forcing people into insecure, low-paid work?

**Kit Malthouse:** The whole point of the new constructive relationship between work coaches and their clients is that they are able to take people’s personal circumstances into account, particularly in respect of children and childcare responsibilities. If sanctions are required, they are at all times reasonable and commensurate with the person’s circumstances. The enormous assistance that we are giving for childcare should hopefully overcome any barriers, but if the hon. Gentleman has constituency cases that he would like to bring to my attention, I would be more than happy to look at them.

**State Pension**

12. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How many people have taken receipt of the state pension in (a) 2010 and (b) 2018 in Kettering constituency; and what the change in the value of the state pension has been over that period. [906167]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions** (Guy Opperman): In 2010, there were 17,400 recipients of the state pension in Kettering, and the most recent data shows that that number had risen to 18,600 in 2017. In cash terms, the full basic state pension is now worth £1,450 a year more in 2018-19 than in 2010. That is a £660 a year more than would have been the case if the pension had been uprated solely by earnings.

**Mr Hollobone:** That is great news for existing pensioners in Kettering and throughout the country, but what about tomorrow’s pensioners? How many people are being auto-enrolled into private pension schemes?

**Guy Opperman:** As you know, Mr Speaker, where Kettering leads the nation follows. In Kettering, a record-breaking 10,000 men and women have now been automatically enrolled into a workplace pension. They are part of the millions of working men and women of this nation who are similarly benefiting from automatic enrolment.

**PIP: Early Assessments**

13. **Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): What criteria her Department uses to recall people in receipt of personal independence payments for an early assessment.
The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): The hon. Gentleman has written to me about a particular constituency case and I very much look forward to sitting down with him to discuss that. Generally, we start the review period around a year ahead to make sure that everybody has the time that they need to provide all the necessary information and so that we can go back to doctors or medical professionals. Sometimes, people’s situation sadly deteriorates and we need to make sure that they get the level of help that they need.

Clive Efford: I am grateful to the Minister for that answer, but I have constituents whose conditions are not going to improve, and one of my constituents has been called back for early assessment three times in three years, causing her a great deal of stress. If people have conditions that are not going to improve, does it not make sense to give them the benefit for longer and not reassess them so regularly?

Sarah Newton: I very much look forward to our meeting, and hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the recent changes. We have worked closely with disabled people and charities. We introduced the severe conditions criteria so that if people are on the highest levels of employment and support allowance or PIP and their condition is, sadly, not going to improve, their claim will be extended almost indefinitely.

Assisted Technology

14. Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): What steps the Government have taken to encourage assisted technology as a means to help disabled people into the workplace.

The Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work (Sarah Newton): We are committed to making sure that all disabled people who want to work have the opportunity to do so. I am really pleased that, over the past four years, more than 600,000 more disabled people are in work. Assistive technology is of course playing a key role in that. We support such initiatives through the Access to Work tech fund and Disability Confident.

Scott Mann: The Minister will know that autonomous vehicle technology is moving along quickly. Does she agree that autonomous vehicles could give people increased social mobility, and enable people with physical disabilities or those who are partially sighted to access work?

Sarah Newton: My hon. Friend raises an important point. The Government are investing hundreds of millions into research and development to make sure that we fully understand the potential of autonomous vehicles and make sure that they really do benefit disabled people.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): In the light of all the controversy around the quality of PIP assessments, would it not save time to get people’s medical records automatically, thereby reducing face-to-face assessments, appeals and the hardship for beneficiaries?

Sarah Newton: The hon. Lady raises an important point. As part of our continuous improvement of PIP, we work closely with healthcare professionals so that we can speed up the process and make sure that we get all the right information to make the best possible decision the first time around.

Pension Transition Arrangements

15. Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): What recent representations she has received from people affected by the pension transition arrangements for women born in the 1950s.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): The Department has received a number of representations from people regarding changes to state pension age since 1995, and the matter has been comprehensively debated on many occasions. Women will receive their state pension either at the same age as men or earlier as we remove the current inequality.

Mr Hepburn: The Government have seen fit to award the richest personal earners and the top five wealthiest corporations in the country tens of billions of pounds in tax cuts. Do the Government think that the Tories are being fair when they steal the pensions of women to stuff their friends’ pockets?

Guy Opperman: It is always good to hear the dinosaur that is my friend from the north-east, the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn). He was in government between 1997 and 2010 when he could have changed the law and did not. The reality of the situation is that the richest 1% have never paid more tax than at present and that corporation tax reductions create jobs, as has been comprehensively proved. He, I am afraid, has no grasp of the facts as they now are.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: I say gently to the hon. Gentleman that we have time for a short question, but not at this point for a preamble. I am afraid. A short question will be fine—30 seconds.

Jack Dromey: Women born in the 1950s are the victims of a monumental pensions injustice. Christine is 62 and cannot retire until she is 66. Her husband has died, and she now has to do three cleaning jobs to make ends meet. At the very least, will the Government follow the lead of the Labour Mayor for Greater Manchester and introduce free bus travel for the women affected? They deserve better.

Guy Opperman: I merely repeat the point that I made previously: between 1997 and 2010, there was a Labour Government. Not only did they support this policy, but they expanded it through the Pensions Act 2008, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows full well, raised the state pension age.

Topical Questions

T1. [906179] Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.
The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Those who take an interest in disability issues will know about our Disability Confident scheme, which supports businesses to employ disabled people. We have launched the Disability Confident 100-day community challenge to get people across this House involved in supporting people in their local area. To date, in 24 hours, 23 MPs have become involved. I hope that the whole House will help disabled people in their area to get into work.

Sir Desmond Swayne: This is complicated, Mr Speaker, so stay with me. What can the Secretary of State do to ensure continuity of universal credit benefit entitlement for those people paid on the same day every month for whom, every now and again, two pay packets will fall into the assessment period?

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Could you explain it again?

Mr Speaker: I think that it is all perfectly clear, as the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) knows.

Ms McVey: My right hon. Friend is in the Chamber much of the time, so he might have heard me talk about this complicated issue quite a bit. It is about not just the last day of every month, but people who might have differing pay packets—they might be paid weekly, fortnightly or four-weekly rather than monthly. A recipient might not get their UC in a month because they have two pay packets falling within that month. What we can do straightaway is this: the person has their entitlement to benefits, and they will then sign on again the month after and remain in UC. We are providing guidance and support for both claimants and employers so that people stay on a cushion of benefit, but the system reflects their fluctuating wage.

Mr Speaker: Well, we are all now considerably better informed.

T2. [906180] Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): If the Secretary of State wants people to have confidence in her Department, what is she doing about Motability? Is it true that its chief executive is on £1.7 million and that it has reserves of £2.4 billion?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is putting into his constituency. I am very grateful for the hard work that my hon. Friend is putting into his constituency. I would really welcome every Member of this House signing up to the 100-day challenge in order to help their many constituents who would really like to work. There is something that everybody can do—constructively, rather than chuntering from a sedentary position.

Hon. Members: Ooh!

Mr Speaker: Order. The Minister was extremely clear; there was no chuntering there, that’s for sure.

T4. [906182] Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State inform us whether it is now official DWP policy to scan claimants’ Facebook and other social media pages for evidence of spending patterns such as meals or days out with their family, and to then use that evidence to turn down illness or disability-related benefits? If this is approved DWP policy, will she put the guidance before the House?

Ms McVey: I will be honest: I do not believe that that is our policy; we would not do that. However, I have seen fraud investigations when people have said that they are not working or are unable to work, but unfortunately what they have posted on their Facebook page has very much proven that not to be the case.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): The Secretary of State knows that I was not happy with the level of outreach support in Shipley when the jobcentre closed at the
beginning of January—we speak of very little else, Mr Speaker. I am delighted that some extra support has now been given, but will my right hon. Friend ensure that a Jobcentre Plus outreach worker is available at a public venue on a regular basis to help claimants in the Shipley constituency?

Ms McVey: When my hon. Friend said that “we” speak of little else, I was not sure whether he was talking about me and he, or he and the rest of the people in Shipley. But he is quite right. I am ensuring that one of the key things this Department does is more outreach work. As UC rolls out, it needs to reflect the needs of local people, and outreach is a sure-fire way to do that.

T5. [906183] David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): May I just drag the Secretary of State back to the National Audit Office report? It said that the Department should “ensure the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes.” How does the Secretary of State square that with her comments about speeding up the scheme, rather than stopping it as the NAO recommends?

Ms McVey: The report said that we should carry on with universal credit and that the roll-out should not be slower. The very reference to it not being slower was to ensure that it is sped up. This has been a slow roll-out but, of course, we have to ensure that the roll-out is right, as we have been doing, hence the extra support that we are providing. I repeat the extra number of jobs that we are helping people get: 3.2 million more people are in work.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Family relationship support providers such as Relate, Tavistock Relationships, OnePlusOne and Marriage Care are concerned that there could be a gap in funding—and therefore in critical services such as parental conflict resolution—after current contracts end next month and before new contracts start. How will Ministers address this?

Ms McVey: There is a range of support and no two families are the same. I encourage my hon. Friend to go to her Jobcentre Plus. I am sure that the really able colleagues there will be able to advise on which benefits and types of support are available.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): The PIP assessment has disproportionately and unfairly impacted on people with epilepsy, with 60% having their budgets reduced when they move from DLA to PIP. This is nearly 20% higher than for any other condition. Will the Government admit that the current assessment process is not fit for purpose for people with epilepsy and set out what is being done to improve it?

Sarah Newton: There is a range of support and no two families are the same. I encourage my hon. Friend to go to her Jobcentre Plus. I am sure that the really able colleagues there will be able to advise on which benefits and types of support are available.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I am sure that you will be delighted, Mr Speaker, that Wimbledon is now under way. Of course, that means that tonnes of British strawberries will be consumed. I very much welcome my right hon. Friend’s recent comments about encouraging more British workers to pick that fruit. Will she update the House on her plans in this area?

Mr Speaker: I am even more pleased that Roger Federer won his opening match in straight sets in less than an hour and a half. Conveniently it finished just before Question Time began—that was very helpful.

Ms McVey: Then everyone is a winner today in this Chamber.

My hon. Friend is right. I have met representatives of the agricultural industry. What was key was people understanding what opportunities are out there, what the work entails and the wage that it pays, and the fact that universal credit supports people in and out of work, which means that they can take up these job opportunities.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): A gentleman in his 80s attended my recent surgery regarding his son, who in his 50s and has complex and multiple disabilities. It beggars belief that he is being found fit for work. Will the Minister meet me to discuss this specific case? When will her Government stop vilifying the disabled and the most vulnerable in society?

Sarah Newton: Of course I will be absolutely delighted to meet the hon. Lady to discuss the case, but I utterly refute her assertion. We are absolutely determined to do everything that we can to make sure that people get the support that they need.
Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): As the Minister will know, universal credit rolls out in Torbay on 5 September. I have already welcomed the work that has been done by the DWP to engage with me. Will he confirm what resources will be made available to ensure that the roll-out on 5 September is successful for my constituents?

Alok Sharma: My hon. Friend will be receiving a letter from the local jobcentre manager, and that will give him an opportunity to engage. We make sure that work coaches provide the one-to-one support that is so important under universal credit.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Joanne in my constituency needs 24-hour care. She was selected for early mandatory reassessment last November, a full year before her PIP was supposed to run out. She lost that reassessment and is appealing. When she lost, her money was stopped, and the family are living on food bank generosity. Does the Minister agree that that is deeply unfair? Will she take a fresh look at maintaining benefit payments for those who have early reassessments—in that case, a whole 12 months before the PIP was supposedly going to run out?

Sarah Newton: I remind the hon. Lady that PIP is a benefit for people both in work and out of work. It is there to recognise the additional costs of having a disability. For people who are unemployed, ESA is the benefit that they need to claim.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Children in workless households are five times more likely to live in poverty than those in working households. Can the Minister tell me by how much the number of workless households has risen or fallen since the Conservatives entered government in 2010?

Kit Malthouse: The proportion of people in absolute poverty is now at a record low, with 1 million fewer people and 300,000 fewer children in absolute poverty since 2010. I cannot at this moment recall the number of households, but I will write to my hon. Friend with that number.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): There are just three case examiners working on 2,841 WASPI cases. The average wait for a complaint is 36 weeks, and last year 687 complaints took more than 43 weeks. Why are Ministers treating WASPI women with such disdain?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): The reality of the situation is that these matters are going through a particular process. That process is ongoing, and the outcomes will be revealed when the decisions are made. There is no difference in any way from how the Government treat other claimants.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): I do not want to see any young person in Redditch unemployed, which was why I set up Redditch Mentors, a scheme to help young people to reach their full potential. The last Labour Government presided over a record rise of 45% in young people being unemployed. What more are the Government doing to improve that?

Alok Sharma: May I commend my hon. Friend on all the work she does in her constituency? Youth unemployment is at a record low—it is 40% lower than it was under the last Labour Government—and programmes such as the youth support programme are available to help individuals. We value young people. It is about time that Labour did the same.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): A Minister suggested earlier that the policies of the Labour Government had not reduced poverty. Are Ministers not aware that child poverty was reduced by 800,000 over 13 years thanks to the policy of the Labour Government—and programmes such as the youth support programme are available to help individuals. We value young people. It is about time that Labour did the same.

Alok Sharma: As the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), made clear, since 2010 there are 300,000 fewer children living in absolute poverty. As we have heard, the route out of poverty is work. We have record levels of employment, and that is something we should all welcome across the House.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but we must now move on. Demand has exceeded supply, as is common.
Detainee Mistreatment and Rendition

3.37 pm

Mr Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) (Con) (Urgent Question):

To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on whether the Government will now reinstate the judge-led inquiry that the former Government promised in 2012, in the light of the two Intelligence and Security Committee reports on detainee mistreatment and rendition published on 28 June 2018.

Mr Speaker: Order. Before the Minister of States replies—we look forward to that with eager anticipation—perhaps I can be the first in the House to congratulate the right hon. and learned Gentleman, the Father of the House, on his birthday. The only prediction I feel that I can make with any confidence is that, as he celebrated two weeks ago today the 48th anniversary of his first election to the House, it is a fair bet that he has now reached the mid-point of his parliamentary career.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): May I also congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke)? At the outset, I want to thank him for his question and his leadership of the all-party parliamentary group on extraordinary rendition.

The Government welcome the publication of the Intelligence and Security Committee’s reports and are grateful for its vital work and examination of allegations of UK involvement in mistreatment and rendition. May I also declare that between 2014 and 2016, I was for a period on the Intelligence and Security Committee when it was conducting this very long investigation? It is right that these reports and as much information as possible from this period are put in the public domain. We need to ensure that we learn from past mistakes so that they are never repeated. The Prime Minister laid a written ministerial statement in Parliament last Thursday, setting out the Government’s initial response to the reports.

It is important to note the context in which the Government, including the security and intelligence agencies and the armed forces, were working in the immediate aftermath of 11 September 2001. The UK responded to the tragic events of 9/11 with the aim of doing everything possible to prevent further loss of innocent life. With the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that UK personnel were working within a new and challenging operating environment for which, in some cases, they were not prepared. It took too long to recognise that guidance and training for staff was inadequate, and too long to understand fully, and take appropriate action on, the risks arising from our engagement with international partners.

The “Current Issues” report recognises that improvements have been made to operational processes since those post-9/11 years. In particular, the consolidated guidance, published in 2010—I would point out that we are the only country to have active consolidated guidance of this sort in operation—provides clear direction for UK personnel and governs their interaction with detainees held by others and the handling of any intelligence received from them. This is coupled with world-leading independent oversight, including by the Committee and the Investigatory Powers Commissioner, Sir Adrian Fulford.

Formal oversight responsibility for the consolidated guidance rests with the Investigatory Powers Commissioner. Last week, Sir Adrian Fulford welcomed the Prime Minister’s invitation to him to make proposals on how the consolidated guidance could be improved further and he would be able to take account of the Committee’s views and those of civil society. The Prime Minister has stated that the Government will give further consideration to the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations. The Government will also give careful consideration to the calls for another judge-led inquiry and will update the House within 60 days of publication of the reports.

I would like once again to reassure the House that the Government do not participate in, solicit, encourage or condone the use of torture for any purpose. We can and should be proud of the work done by our intelligence and service personnel, often in the most difficult circumstances. It is right that they should be held to the highest possible standards, and I am confident that the changes we have made in recent years will allow us both to protect our national security and to maintain our global reputation as a champion for human rights across the world.

Mr Clarke: We need robust and effective intelligence services to protect our national security, and I am sure we are all grateful to those who carry out this work and do it for us. I welcome the Minister’s reiteration of our opposition to torture and our acceptance that good but robust standards must be maintained. In the light of that, however, I would like to know why the Intelligence and Security Committee was stopped from completing the report, on which he himself had been working, when it had already uncovered the unacceptable situation of a large number of cases of British complicity in torture, mistreatment and hijacking of people to Guantanamo Bay and to Libya?

The Committee reached the stage at which it wished to call witnesses directly involved. As it makes clear in its own report, it reached the stage at which it wanted “to examine certain matters in detail, which could only be done by taking evidence from those who had been on the ground”. The Government denied that, and the Committee felt it had no alternative but to stop its work. Why was that done, and what are we trying to cover up of what was done during the time of the Blair Government?

The judge-led inquiry was set up in 2010, to wide welcome, and Sir Peter Gibson produced a report that established more than 20 important questions that we all agreed should be answered. The inquiry had to be suspended—brought to an end—in 2012 while we waited for the police investigations on Libya to finish. As Justice Secretary at the time, I announced the delay to the House. I said:

“It will then be possible for the Government to take a final view as to whether a further judicial inquiry still remains necessary to add any further information of value to future policy making and the national interest.”—[Official Report, 19 December 2013, Vol. 572, c. 916.]

We had actually guaranteed earlier that the inquiry would be resumed, which was welcomed across the House. It was suspended so that the ISC could start, and then the suspension was put in place, under the terms I have just read out.

It is quite obvious that, as the ISC had not finished its work under the previous coalition Government—I spoke with the full authority of the then Prime Minister and
the whole Government, including the current Prime Minister, who was then Home Secretary—we would have considered it necessary to appoint a fresh judge-led inquiry, as the ISC has been frustrated from going any further. Therefore, what reputable reasons do the Government have for not holding an inquiry? I am glad that the Minister has said that a judge-led inquiry is still being considered, and I hope that a prompt announcement will be made that such an inquiry will now follow.

Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend. As he rightly says, he was the Minister who made statements to the House on whether there should be a judge-led inquiry. Indeed, as Justice Secretary, he made a statement in January 2012, and as Minister without Portfolio, he made a further statement in December 2013. In the further statement, there was a slight measure of doubt about whether there would indeed be a judge-led inquiry. He said:

“It will then be possible for the Government to take a final view as to whether a further judicial inquiry still remains necessary” — [Official Report, 19 December 2013; Vol. 572, c. 916.]

That remains the case. As I said earlier, the Government will give careful consideration to whether a judge-led inquiry is necessary.

I say again to my right hon. and learned Friend that this inquiry has gone on for very many years—his statements about the judge-led inquiry were made in 2012 and 2013, and here we are in 2018. I take issue with his use of the word “complicity”, which I think was a notch too strong. I think that it is honest to say that the ISC found no evidence that agencies had deliberately turned a blind eye.

Perhaps the main issue here is whether in our intelligence agencies it would be right, 15 years after the event, to take someone who was then a junior operative in the agencies it would be right, 15 years after the event, to deliberately turn a blind eye.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this hugely important urgent question. I congratulate the Father of the House on securing it. Today, as on so many other matters, he has spoken a truth, logic and wisdom that transcend all party divides and will, I hope, be listened to by his own Government.

The ISC report lays bare the sheer scale of our country’s involvement in torture and rendition. In doing so, it vindicates those who for years sought to expose these facts—investigative journalists, civil liberties campaigners and Members of this House—and who were right to claim that the full truth was being hidden. As detailed as the report is, it still does not give us the full truth, and we will not have the full truth until we have a full and independent judicial inquiry—an inquiry with access to all available evidence and the ability to question directly the military and intelligence officers involved. I hear what the right hon. Gentleman says about junior officers, but we expect that of police officers, for example, when there are investigations. We expect police officers of all ranks to answer questions and the same should apply here.

We also need to have access to all the Ministers and security chiefs who oversaw those activities. Like all such inquiries, we do not need it just to examine what went wrong in the past; we need it to learn lessons for the future and to provide recommendations that cannot simply be ignored by the Government. Most importantly, we need it to ensure that never again is the UK involved in these illegal and barbaric acts.

I ask the Minister today to listen to the ISC, to listen to the Father of the House and to listen to the united voice of the Opposition parties in this House, because we all recognise the need for a comprehensive investigation of the UK’s involvement in torture and rendition and the use of secret courts, with unfettered access to all potential evidence and witnesses. Many in this House have great confidence in Judge Adrian Fulford, but in my view anything that is inquired into should be done in a way that is structured and formal.

We all recognise the need for a public consultation of civil liberties groups on the current consolidated guidance to identify the gaps and grey areas that have allowed these abuses to happen and to recommend the changes that must be made, so that we can all be confident that they are not happening now and can never happen again. But we also all recognise that, to achieve these things, there is only one course of action: we urgently need, and the country is owed, a full judicial inquiry.

Sir Alan Duncan: I listened very carefully to what the right hon. Lady said and I would be grateful if she thought again about the words she used when she accused officials in our agencies—I think that I quote accurately—of being “involved in torture”. They were not involved in torture, so I really think the right hon. Lady may want to come back to the House and say that, actually, that is an inaccurate accusation.

These were very unique times. The twin towers had been blown up in the biggest terrorist attack we have seen. It went right to the heart of the United States psyche, and there was inevitably going to be a very strong and strict response. We are, of course, very close allies of the United States and work very closely with them on intelligence matters. What the response led to was a lot of officers being asked to do things that they had not been trained for and had never encountered before. It took time to understand that there were certain practices going on which required new rules.

Perhaps, if there is a fault, it is the time it took for that appreciation to dawn. But once it did, I think it is of credit to this country and our intelligence agencies that they reviewed their practices, revised them and adjusted as best they could to the new world in which they were working.

The right hon. Lady says that I should listen to the ISC. I can say that I have done so, as I was on the Committee. Not only did I listen to it, but many of those interviewed also had to listen to me. The inquisition and witness sessions of the Committee, chaired by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), were very robust indeed. I also say to her that Adrian Fulford is part of a structured and formal apparatus. The fact that the Prime Minister has said that he should look at the consolidated guidance in the
way that she has is, I think, addressing some of the outstanding issues, which, quite rightly, the House would like to see studied.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): It is not the role of the ISC to take a view on whether there should be a judge-led inquiry. That is a matter for the Government and for this House. What I think can and should be said about this matter, and which may be helpful for the Minister, are three points.

First, as the Minister will appreciate, when the report was published, the Committee was extremely disappointed that it was not able to access the witnesses from whom it wanted to hear. It is important to understand that this was not because it wished to pass judgment on those witnesses—far from it—but because it felt strongly that the witnesses would be able to help to fill out the information that was present on the documents in a way that would be helpful to the purposes of the Committee in explaining to the House and the public what had been going on.

The second point, which has been raised from time to time, is what is to happen to the Libyan cases. My right hon. Friend has not commented on that, but what I will say about the Libyan cases is that in view of the difficulties that the Committee has experienced, there can be absolutely no question of the Committee being willing to consider those cases in the light of the difficulties it has had.

Thirdly, if I may gently pick up with my right hon. Friend the length of time this report has taken, the reason why it has taken so long is that, for nearly 12 months of that period, there was no Committee sitting at all, which should be a matter of concern to the House, and there was a period of six months, which in my view was also much too long, in which we failed to get a response from the Government about our request to have those witnesses.

Sir Alan Duncan: When it comes to unlawful rendition, there is now a very different system. The UK’s immigration authorities are responsible for the collection of manifests, for instance, for private flights arriving in or transiting through the UK. If we had strong, verifiable information that an individual on board was being rendered contrary to international law principles, we would anticipate that the police would attend the plane on arrival to investigate. The diplomatic flight clearance process ensures that all flight requests are assessed and, where necessary, sent to the Foreign Office for political clearance. All incoming flight requests through the diplomatic flights clearance process and subsequent decisions are registered electronically on the Foreign Office records management system and are fully searchable by the Foreign Office.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The House will be grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. I quite understand what he is saying about the difficulty of a Committee working when it is not actually constituted, and I hear what he says about the Libyan cases. In the case of witnesses, I think it has been made clear in the House that he regrets that he was unable to see more of them, but the fundamental question here is: if things went wrong as it is thought they did, could such things ever happen again? The reassurance that we can offer the House, and indeed the wider world, is that agencies now have clear guidance, including the consolidated guidance, which covers all aspects of dealing with detainees and has training on operational management. Compliance with this guidance is mandatory and this is very much a part of agency culture. The consolidated guidance is coupled with a world-leading independent oversight regime, underpinned by the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, which has just commenced. That is not just shameful but could, in fact, be criminal, if, as Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Mercer has suggested, any of these events took place in the context of international conflict or war.

Does the Minister understand that justice must be done and must be seen to be done? That does mean a judge-led inquiry as soon as possible, with all the reports reported as appropriate to the police. Will he clarify who in the Government on day-to-day basis is responsible for making sure that the UK is not in future complicit in unlawful rendition? And will he assure us of the UK Government’s full co-operation with ongoing inquiries by Police Scotland into the implications of the possible use of Scottish airports in unlawful rendition?

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Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): The House will be grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments. I quite understand what he is saying about the difficulty of a Committee working when it is not actually constituted, and I hear what he says about the Libyan cases. In the case of witnesses, I think it has been made clear in the House that he regrets that he was unable to see more of them, but the fundamental question here is: if things went wrong as it is thought they did, could such things ever happen again? The reassurance that we can offer the House, and indeed the wider world, is that agencies now have clear guidance, including the consolidated guidance, which covers all aspects of dealing with detainees and has training on operational management. Compliance with this guidance is mandatory and this is very much a part of agency culture. The consolidated guidance is coupled with a world-leading independent oversight regime, underpinned by the Justice and Security Act 2013 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016, which has just commenced. That is not just shameful but could, in fact, be criminal, if, as Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Mercer has suggested, any of these events took place in the context of international conflict or war.

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Sir Alan Duncan: When it comes to unlawful rendition, there is now a very different system. The UK’s immigration authorities are responsible for the collection of manifests, for instance, for private flights arriving in or transiting through the UK. If we had strong, verifiable information that an individual on board was being rendered contrary to international law principles, we would anticipate that the police would attend the plane on arrival to investigate. The diplomatic flight clearance process ensures that all flight requests are assessed and, where necessary, sent to the Foreign Office for political clearance. All incoming flight requests through the diplomatic flights clearance process and subsequent decisions are registered electronically on the Foreign Office records management system and are fully searchable by the Foreign Office.

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not in future be involved in any form of torture, and will the Minister commit to a judge-led inquiry to underline that view?

Sir Alan Duncan: We will continue our close co-operation will the United States on a range of foreign and security policy issues, but we will maintain our integrity on human rights and interrogation procedures. Intelligence sharing between our two countries has undoubtedly saved British lives, and in both countries intelligence work takes place within a very strong legal framework. We operate under the rule of law, we are accountable to it and we will uphold it.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Minister accept that it is not just bleeding heart liberals and humanitarians who reject the use of torture even under the most provocative circumstances, but senior counter-insurgency professionals such as the late Sir Robert Thompson? He wrote in his seminal work, “Defeating Communist Insurgency” in 1966 as follows:

“There is a very strong temptation...for government forces to act outside the law... Not only is this morally wrong, but, over a period, it will create more practical difficulties for a government than it solves.”

We really should not have to learn that basic lesson over and over again.

Sir Alan Duncan: If there is one person in the House whom I would most definitely not describe as a bleeding heart liberal it is my right hon. Friend. I understand exactly what he says, and again I can but reiterate that the Government, in everything they do, under much enhanced rules, procedures and practices and on the back of what we have learned from the Committee and the preceding events, will uphold the rule of law and the decencies that all of us in the House expect.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Just over 10 years ago, the then Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, came to the House and apologised for the fact that his predecessor, Jack Straw, had misled Select Committees, including the Foreign Affairs Select Committee when I chaired it, and that in fact the United States had rendered people to Guantanamo via Diego Garcia, a British territory, having lied to or misled the British Government and forced them therefore to mislead this House. In the interests of getting to the bottom of all these matters, is it not time for a judge-led inquiry, which would not be perceived by the public as having any political taint? Accusations have been made that might be completely unjustified, but the public will not be satisfied unless there is a full inquiry.

Sir Alan Duncan: The hon. Gentleman’s question itself illustrates the period over which much of this has unfolded. It has been well over a decade, and over that period we have learned an enormous amount and changed our practices. We are fundamentally opposed to unlawful rendition, to which he referred, and as such we do not use rendition. It is not part of our security apparatus. If a foreign Government were to approach Her Majesty’s Government, a request involving the transfer of a person between jurisdictions would be granted only where the purpose of the transit complied fully with international law.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend plays a significant role through the Council of Europe in seeking to maintain the highest possible standards of human rights throughout the 47 member states. We have a good reputation, and that reputation must be maintained. I fully accept that the first priority of Government must be the protection of the realm, and that that sometimes involves difficult decisions, but if Ministers have failed in the past, is it not right that we should acknowledge that?

Sir Alan Duncan: There will of course be a formal Government response to the Committee’s reports within 60 days, and if it is thought that any such comment is needed in that regard, of course it will be made.

I thank my hon. Friend for everything that he does in the Council of Europe, a body in which there are many controversies and in which his voice, and that of the United Kingdom, do an enormous amount to uphold the standards that we would like to see in countries across the world.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): When the Attorney General apologised earlier this year for UK involvement in the rendition of Abdel Hakim Belhaj and Fatima Boudchar, he told Parliament that the Government had

“enacted reforms to ensure that the problems of the past will not be repeated.”—[Official Report, 10 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 927.]

However, the ISC has concluded that the Government’s policy on torture

“falls short in a number of areas”, and has warned that

“a full review is long overdue.”

Do the Government still believe that their reforms would prevent any repeat of these abuses?

Sir Alan Duncan: The Prime Minister, on behalf of the Government, apologised unreservedly to Mr Belhaj and his wife in May this year, saying that we were profoundly sorry for the ordeal that they had suffered and for the role that we had played in it. As we said at the time, the UK Government have learnt many lessons from this period, and I believe that those lessons have now been converted into much-enhanced practices which are built into the DNA of our intelligence agencies and all who work for them. The consolidated guidance that forms the bedrock of this will be studied further by Sir Adrian Fulford. I hope that, taken together, all that

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): The reports clearly state that there is no evidence that any of our intelligence officers were directly involved in the mistreatment of detainees. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to point out that we are the only country in the developed world to produce consolidated guidance in the way that we have, but we must accept that mistakes were made. Does my right hon. Friend agree that “consolidated guidance” is a bit of a misnomer? If it is to have the widespread confidence that we feel that it should, its title should be looked at again, because it is not guidance. It is a standard for action relating to detention and rendition, to be interpreted by the agencies individually, and to be accountable to the House.
Sir Alan Duncan: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for all the work that he has been doing on the Committee. As he rightly points out, we are already the only country that publishes guidance. The Committee found no evidence that agencies had deliberately turned a blind eye, but the Investigatory Powers Commissioner now has a very important role to play in the oversight of the consolidated guidance. Last week the Prime Minister invited him to make proposals for how it could be improved further, and I have no doubt that the Committee of which he is a member will exercise its rights to make recommendations whenever it thinks them appropriate.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Committee has met for five years, and I have been a member of it for the past two. Investigating this issue has been a thorough exercise. My question to the Minister is simply this: does he believe that, if the Government or the House ultimately decided on a judge-led inquiry, that judge-led inquiry could call witnesses who were denied to the Committee?

Sir Alan Duncan: It would be invidious of me not to thank the right hon. Gentleman for the service that he gives to the Committee, which he joined just after I had left. I do not want to pre-empt speculatively what might be the possible shape of a judge-led inquiry should it so happen, and I hope the right hon. Gentleman will allow me not to answer his question specifically, as it would indeed be only speculative.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): The Minister has rightly pointed out the unprecedented and extremely difficult position that many UK security operatives were in at the time, but the fact remains that clearly some terrible things were done. The ISC report says: “the UK tolerated actions, and took others, that we regard as inexcusable.”

This was an ugly, ugly moment in our country’s history. May I reassure the Minister—he is probably getting the same question from right across the House—that when he has taken his 60 days and he decides to come back to the House and respond on behalf of the Government, there will be a huge cheer should he stand up and say he is going to introduce the independent judge-led inquiry that the former Secretary of State for Justice my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) promised at the time? This matter will not be put to rest until he does so and the inquiry happens.

Sir Alan Duncan: I hope time will prove that my hon. Friend is not right in saying that this would be the only way to put matters to rest. The inquiry itself over these years has been very thorough, admirable and indeed a good example of democracy working well, where this House and Ministers are held to account by a specially constituted independent Committee. It is absolutely true to say that it did take time for us to realise quite what was going on and for many of our agency people on the ground to realise that things to which they were not used—which they had not encountered before—were happening at the hands of others. I think that has largely now been addressed, but we will never rest totally satisfied and will always examine whether we can do better.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I greatly welcome what the Minister says on the subject of the consolidated guidance, but he will be aware that in December last year the intelligence services commissioner identified eight cases in which the consolidated guidance had not been followed by UK officials, leading to the possibility of their either providing or using intelligence that could have led to torture or mistreatment. Can the Minister tell the House whether the individuals in these eight cases have been told of UK involvement that may have led to their mistreatment?

Sir Alan Duncan: There will of course be a formal response to any such comments made in the Committee’s report, but the right hon. Gentleman is really asking what happens if we ever receive intelligence from countries that torture, and whether that amounts to collusion in torture. The reality is that in most cases countries do not disclose the sources of their intelligence that they share with us. However, the guidance outlines the action to be taken if we suspect that intelligence has been derived from the mistreatment of a detainee, and we ensure that our partners are in no doubt about the standards to which we adhere.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is the Government’s official estimate of the number of post-9/11 illegal renditions with which the British authorities were connected?

Sir Alan Duncan: I regret that I do not have a statistic of that detail in front of me. I am not sure whether it appears in the Committee report, but I will investigate and write to my hon. Friend if the information is readily available. I do not guarantee that, as I am not sure what statistics are in the public domain.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): When the then Leader of the House made his initial statement on winding up the Gibson inquiry in January 2012, the then shadow Lord Chancellor, now Mayor of London, asked that it be paused. The reason given as to why it was not was that the process would take so long, and three times the Leader of the House said there would be an independent judge-led inquiry, so it was always contemplated that it would take this long. In the interim, the ISC inquiry has been inadequate by its own admission, and for this reason a number of torture survivors have not taken part. There are many people who could have given evidence that has not yet been given, so will the Minister say why this will take 60 days and what criteria he is using to decide whether to go ahead with the inquiry?

Sir Alan Duncan: Her Majesty’s Government will respond within the 60 days to the Committee report. I do not think there is much more that I can add to that at this stage. Many years have elapsed since the statements were made in 2012 and 2013, and the question of whether anything could be added that would be of benefit to our knowledge or usefulness is increasingly in doubt as time passes.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Intelligence and Security Committee was reluctantly wound up in January 2012, the then shadow Lord Chancellor, now Mayor of London, asked that it be paused. The reason given as to why it was not was that the process would take so long, and three times the Leader of the House said there would be an independent judge-led inquiry, so it was always contemplated that it would take this long. In the interim, the ISC inquiry has been inadequate by its own admission, and for this reason a number of torture survivors have not taken part. There are many people who could have given evidence that has not yet been given, so will the Minister say why this will take 60 days and what criteria he is using to decide whether to go ahead with the inquiry?

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Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): The Intelligence and Security Committee was reluctantly forced to draw a line under its inquiry. Will the Minister tell us whether it was the Prime Minister personally who refused the Committee access to key witnesses?

Sir Alan Duncan: This goes back to the answer that I have just given to the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter). The question is whether that can add much more to the fund of knowledge that the Committee has already gathered.
John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): In order to restore public confidence, is there not a case for a rare public session of the ISC so that those who were in charge of our intelligence services at the time and those who are in charge now can account for their actions and describe what lessons have been learned?

Sir Alan Duncan: I slightly take issue with the hon. Gentleman, in that I think our intelligence services enjoy massive public confidence, and they deserve to do so. They put their own lives in danger sometimes, and they work to the highest standards of decency and democratic values that anyone could ask for. Instead of saying that they lack public confidence, I would like to take this opportunity to say that they enjoy enormous public confidence and they deserve to do so. I hope that that will continue.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Does the Minister agree that there are no longer any practical or legal hurdles preventing the Government from delivering their long-promised judge-led inquiry?

Sir Alan Duncan: I think I have answered that question in various ways over the course of the past 45 minutes. This is being studied further and it will be part of the Government’s response in due course.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his comprehensive and detailed response. Will he outline the procedure that was taken with the 128 complaints made by foreign liaison services about incidents of mistreatment? Will he tell us how they were dealt with? Does he feel that this matter has measured up to the Government’s protocol of dealing with these issues?

Sir Alan Duncan: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if, in answering an urgent question on whether there should be a judge-led inquiry, I have not gone into as much detail as he requests. I am not equipped to give an answer on such a specific question, and the main answers that I have been giving are in response to the definition of the urgent question before the House today.
Saddleworth Moor and Tameside: Ongoing Fire

4.17 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op) (Urgent Question): To ask the Home Office if it will make a statement regarding the ongoing fire on the Saddleworth and Tameside moors.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): The moorland fires on Saddleworth Moor near Manchester and across the border in Lancashire at Winter Hill near Bolton and into Derbyshire remain major incidents. The numbers of fire appliances and firefighters on the scene fluctuates each day according to the immediate need. However, the Manchester fire and rescue service has around 30 fire appliances currently deployed, and 29 appliances have been deployed to the Lancashire fire. In addition, two high-volume pumps are in use, and a variety of specialist equipment and teams. Support is also being provided from other fire and rescue services across the north of England and as far afield as the west midlands, and a team of specialist wildfire firefighters from Wales has also attended the Winter Hill site.

This wider support is being co-ordinated by a team in the Merseyside fire and rescue service, directly funded by the Home Office, which provides specialist support in major emergencies such as this. Furthermore, 100 military personnel have been providing support on Saddleworth Moor since Thursday, and the initial three-day deployment has been extended to tomorrow, with a request now received for the soldiers to continue their support to the Manchester fire and rescue service through until Friday. The response currently also includes one helicopter from the local water company, and support from the National Police Air Service. We remain in regular contact with the fire and rescue services responding to the incident, and I have spoken about the fires with the chiefs of the Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services. The Home Secretary has also spoken to the Mayor of Manchester, Andy Burnham.

I place on the record my appreciation, which will be shared across the House, of the incredible work of the firefighters, the military and the other partner agencies in responding to the wildfires. The current hot, dry weather means that the fires are likely to persist for some time. The Government continue to liaise with the responders on the ground who are tackling the fires, and we are ready to provide further support when it is needed.

Jonathan Reynolds: I thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this question on the behalf of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham East and Saddleworth (Debbie Abrahams). Words alone cannot adequately describe the scale of the challenge that the fire has posed to my constituents and to the emergency services in Greater Manchester. I express my gratitude to the Greater Manchester fire and rescue service, which has worked tirelessly in the most extreme conditions, and to the police, the Army and Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council for their exemplary work over the past week.

Are the Government fully engaged in doing all that they can to support those services? Given that we now have two major incidents just 25 miles apart, including a threat to critical communications infrastructure at Winter Hill, many colleagues and I were surprised that no Cobra meeting was convened over the weekend. Will the Minister say why that was? Will the Minister confirm that the magnificent support from Army personnel, who are literally beating the fire back with paddles, will remain in place for as long as we need it? If things get worse and more support is needed, will more support be made available? Will he say whether there is any truth in the rumour that military helicopters cannot be used to fight the fires because they no longer possess the correct firefighting equipment?

Will the Minister assure me that cost is not an issue? A fire such as this, which burns down into the peat, needs to be put out entirely because conditions can cause it to flare up again, so we must provide whatever the Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire services tell us they need. Crucially, will the Minister assure me that the cost of the military support will be met out of national contingency budgets, not local fire budgets which are already under severe strain?

Looking to the future, eventually the rain will always fall on Manchester, but that might now bring other risks. Our flooding plans are predicated on the moors being able to absorb significant rainfall. That capacity will obviously have been affected. Will the Minister therefore direct all relevant national agencies to help us prepare for that? Finally, will the Minister join me in praising my constituents, particularly the people of Calico Crescent in Carrbrook who were evacuated, for their stoic response in this most challenging of times?

Mr Hurd: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his approach and for the gratitude that he articulated, which will be shared across the House, for the extraordinary work done not just by the firefighters, but by volunteers, the military and all the agencies involved in this heroic task. I send my commiserations to his constituents who have been directly affected and displaced. Their fortitude and patience have drawn wide admiration from across the country.

Turning to the hon. Gentleman’s central concerns, the Government are fully engaged, as he would expect during an incident of this size. As I said in my opening answer, I have spoken to both fire chiefs, and the Home Secretary has spoken to the Mayor. Our message has been simple: “Have you got what you need? If you haven’t, ask and we will provide.” That has been the case so far and will be the approach going forward. I share the hon. Gentleman’s hope that normal service will be resumed in terms of the weather over Manchester, but we will provide all the support and resources that the effort will require, because it looks like it will have to continue for some time. The teams will have the support that they need.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Of course, a number of constituencies are affected by this horrifying series of fires, including the constituency of Chorley, and the House and the people of Chorley will be pleased to know that the right hon. Member for Chorley (Sir Lindsay Hoyle), the Chairman of Ways and Means, is in the Chamber to listen to this exchange.
Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I pay tribute to the firefighters from Ribble Valley and from Chorley who are fighting those fires on the moors. I also pay tribute to those from the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry)—

Andrew Stephenson (Pendle) (Con): And Pendle.

Mr Evans: And Pendle. The list is endless. We pay tribute to the firefighters’ courage and dedication, particularly given the heat they are also having to endure.

As the Minister knows, there are many summer festivals at this time, and people release lanterns that use candles to make them rise. Clearly, such things are a fire hazard in themselves, so will he look to ban them? Will he also make it absolutely clear that people flying drones over the area could well jeopardise the operation of those fighting the fires?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for referencing the presence of the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on the Front Bench, and I am sure that the Minister is pleased as well.

Mr Hurd: I join you, Mr Speaker, in recognising the presence of Mr Deputy Speaker, to whom I spoke on the phone yesterday. He is concerned, as ever, for his constituents, and I join my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) in saluting the work of firefighters from across the country who have stepped into this heroic, protracted task.

On the use of drones, there is no clearer message than that issued by the Lancashire fire brigade: don’t. If people are considering going to take some photographs of the fire, don’t. Just get out of the way and let the fire service do its job. Do not get in the fire service’s way.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting the urgent question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds).

The emergency responders have done an excellent job in tackling the fire. Their courageous work, day and night, for over a week in extremely hot conditions goes to show their passionate commitment to public service. The dedicated work of the fire service, with support from the Army, has prevented the fire from spreading to surrounding populated areas, and lives and properties are now not at risk.

I could spend my whole contribution talking about my admiration for the emergency services yet, while this Government wax lyrical about their appreciation for the fire service, they have presided over eight years of scathing cuts to fire authority budgets and firefighter numbers. The typical Government response is to point to fire authority reserves. However, given the progressive funding squeeze since 2010, alongside the required earmarking of most of the reserves, there are serious questions to be asked about the level of funding the Government have allocated for fire authorities to deliver a fully resourced service.

Will the Minister provide more financial support to local authorities in the area to mitigate the impact of the fire? I understand the exceptional circumstances of this fire, but the fire and emergency services must be staffed, resourced and paid adequately to ensure they are sufficiently prepared for any emergency. They should not be expected to react on a shoestring budget.

The effect on staffing levels of budgetary cuts over the past eight years is clear. Since 2010, Greater Manchester and Lancashire between them have had around 1,000 firefighters cut. Will the Minister acknowledge the failure of austerity and take a lead from Labour’s commitment to recruit 3,000 new firefighters and to scrap the pay cap?

Mr Hurd: The only bit of the hon. Lady’s question with which I agree is her admiration for the emergency services, which is shared on both sides of the House. The rest was badly misjudged, because this is not the day to try to make political points. What the country wants to hear is cross-party support and admiration for the emergency services, and it wants to hear whether the Government are prepared to commit the resources to support this effort for as long as it lasts, which is what I have done.

The hon. Lady talks about resources for the fire service, and I will let the numbers speak for themselves. Core spending power has risen this year by 1.2%. As a country, we are spending more than £2.3 billion on our fire service. The fire service has £650 million of reserves, which have grown by 88% since 2011. We are conducting a demand review to inform the next comprehensive spending review. This Government are determined to make sure our emergency services have the resources they need.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Because of the extreme drought and dryness in these magnificent and very important areas, will the Minister work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to see whether there is a case for a comprehensive review of the trigger points on the fire severity index to develop a better framework for managing such situations? In addition to his rightful praise for our superb firefighters and the Army, will he also congratulate local farmers, gamekeepers and many others who live and work on the moors whose knowledge, equipment and expertise have greatly assisted the professional help?

Mr Hurd: I certainly join my right hon. Friend in joining all those people who have contributed, particularly if they have that kind of long, historical expertise of the moors. I certainly also undertake to work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to make sure that the lessons from this are learned to the full. I can give him some assurance that the National Fire Chiefs Council is driving work nationally to further improve the UK’s approach to wildfire preparedness, prevention and intervention, and this has included a wildfire prevention toolkit, which provides information and a range of tools to help fire and rescue agencies and partner agencies to prevent and reduce the impact of wildfires. He will understand the point: when a major incident such as this is over and has been managed properly, we have, alongside the congratulations and admiration, to learn the lessons from it.
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) on securing this urgent question. I will keep my comments short so that hon. Members with constituencies in the vicinity have adequate time to ask questions. On behalf of the Scottish National party, I would like to join in the congratulations to those in the fire and rescue services from Greater Manchester and beyond who are fighting this fire in terrible circumstances and to the soldiers from the Royal Regiment of Scotland, who, I am proud to say, are there assisting. In the light of the terrible conditions that the firefighters are working in, will the Minister confirm that the Government will step in to make sure they have all the resources they need? There were some reports at the weekend of firefighters appealing for sun cream and socks—rather basic provisions that they should have. Will he also tell us what steps the Government will take to support families affected by the fire who live in the vicinity?

Mr Hurd: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for her support for the performance of the emergency services. I hope I can give her assurance on both her points. On the support for the firefighters up on the moors, there is a challenge. As the fire chiefs explained to me, they want to try to keep the firefighters up there as long as possible to keep up the momentum, but that presents logistical challenges in providing some basic needs. However, that is being managed by agencies, not least by a superb voluntary response as well from the community, which they have been extremely touched by. On support for families, of course that is a high priority and it is kept under constant review by the agencies involved in managing this situation.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): Unmanaged moorland will often have heather growing to waist height. In circumstances such as this, that makes a tinder box of the moors. When I was at DEFRA, I was in receipt of a lot of appeals from the Moorland Association and others saying, “The wetter the better for moorland.” They want to block up grips and to see our moorland getting wetter. Good management of upland areas is vital, so will my right hon. Friend reject the absurd article in The Guardian that seemingly suggests that good moorland management, both for shooting and for agriculture, has in some way been complicit in causing this?

Mr Hurd: I defer to my right hon. Friend’s personal knowledge and his experience as a highly distinguished DEFRA Minister. I am certainly no expert in moorland management and I think we should listen to the experts on this. That comes back to the point I was making earlier about the need to learn lessons from incidents such as this.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): My constituency is immediately adjacent to the fires on Saddleworth moor, and I wish to extend my thanks to Derbyshire fire service, the police, the Army, national park rangers, countryside rangers, Glossop mountain rescue, gamekeepers and farmers, who are all helping to tackle this fire. Will the Minister please assure me that the non-full-time firefighting staff involved in tackling the fire have been given the proper protective equipment, as we have seen disturbing pictures on social media of Army staff without protective fire equipment being drafted in to put out the fires?

Mr Hurd: I can give the hon. Lady that assurance. The primary responsibility of those managing and leading in this situation is the personal protection and safety of their people, and I have heard nothing to the contrary on that. I will seek further reassurances, but my understanding is that the work is being led with the kind of responsibility that she would expect. On her wider point, which she made well, the coalition of community support agencies, civil society and the state agencies coming together under extremely difficult and demanding circumstances has been heroic and deserves the House’s admiration.

Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): Will the Minister join me in thanking the on-call firefighters of Alsager community fire station, whom I met yesterday and who, together with fire officers from across Cheshire, are travelling some distance to help with the work at Saddleworth moor? At the same time, fire officers are protecting communities where the heat means that there is risk of fire, as happened at the weekend at Mow Cop in my constituency. Firefighters are spending long hours protecting us, as well as going to Saddleworth moor.

Mr Hurd: I am sure that the whole House wants to put on record our admiration for not just the response to these particular major incidents and the way that firefighters have come from throughout the country to support that work, but for the work that they do back in their communities. They are one of the most trusted public services in this country, for very good reason. Day after day, dedicated firefighters get up without knowing what they are going to work towards on our behalf and for our public safety.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Sadly, because of global warming, we are likely to see more fires on this scale, so what extra resources is the Minister planning to allocate to emergency services and fire services to enable them to deal better with increased incidents of moorland fires?

Mr Hurd: On funding for the emergency services, I stated earlier that the core spending power of fire services increased this year, even though, as the hon. Lady knows, the number of fire incidents has fallen by 50% over the past decade. On the management of risk going forward, I am leading an exercise and speaking to the Minister please assure me that the non-full-time firefighting staff involved in tackling the fire have been given the proper protective equipment, as we have seen disturbing pictures on social media of Army staff without protective fire equipment being drafted in to put out the fires?

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Will the Minister join me in thanking Staffordshire fire and rescue service for the incredible work it has been doing at Thorncliffe in the constituency of my parliamentary neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley)?

Mr Hurd: I am delighted to show appreciation for and thank, on the Government’s behalf, all the fire services that are involved in the support operation for these major incidents, as well as to thank my hon. Friend’s local service for the work that it does back in Staffordshire.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): May I put on record my thanks to all the firefighters and those from the armed forces for supporting our fire service during these moorland fires? Many volunteer groups, such as
Mr Hurd: The ho. Lady makes an extremely good point about the importance of the highly valued contribution of the voluntary sector and civil society in these types of situations, in which the combination of the state and civil society working together is so effective. I know from the fire officers how much that voluntary work has been appreciated. The Government do a lot to support the voluntary sector in this country. As we look forward and try to learn from these lessons, we need to think harder about the role of civil society and how it is supported in these situations.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Arson—the deliberate starting of a fire—is an appalling crime. Will the Minister make sure that anyone caught and found guilty of such an offence in respect of these moorland fires feels the full force of the law, with exemplary sentences to act as a deterrent to anyone else?

Mr Hurd: The whole House would agree with the abhorrence that my hon. Friend expresses about arson, which is the most terrible crime. He may be aware that one arrest has been made in the context of these fires. Of course, the criminal justice process must reach its conclusion on that, but I expect the full weight of the law to be applied.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I associate myself and my party with all those who have made expressions of support and encouragement to those who are currently engaged in fighting this fire? The countryside that we currently see ablaze is very special, but it is not unique. We see that sort of area the length and breadth of the country and it supports communities involved in hill farming and crofting.

Mr Hurd: I wholly endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about the value of hill farming communities and the beauty of the particular locations of these terrible incidents. I come back to what I said before to my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) about the need, once this situation is under control, to work closely with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and others to think about how these risks are managed more effectively in the future.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I too pay tribute to the emergency services and to the members of the local communities for their work in fighting this fire. I travelled through the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) yesterday, and the impact on the air quality in particular is something of which nobody in Greater Manchester and around can be unaware. In considering the lessons learned, what attention will the Minister be able to give to a programme of public education, particularly for young people, in relation to fire safety on the moors?

Mr Hurd: There is a great deal of information out there on fire safety, not least from organisations such as the Forestry Commission. Again, in the light of these types of incidents, we need to look again at what is out there to see whether it is fit for purpose. The hon. Lady raised the issue of air quality, which I know is an issue of concern for many constituents. Public Health England is issuing health advice to residents and to those travelling in the areas affected by smoke and ash. I urge residents and constituents to keep referring to that.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): May I note for the record that I hire my constituency office space from Greater Manchester fire and rescue service, and I am very proud to do so watching its heroic efforts this weekend? The scale of the problem is demonstrated by the fact that people can smell the burning moors all across my south Manchester constituency. May I just press the Minister on a question that my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) asked about the military capacity to deal with this problem? There is a worry that we do not have the kit to do the job; that the military helicopters are not equipped with the technical capacity to put out fires. Can he clarify whether that is the case?

Mr Hurd: I do not believe that that is the case. A military helicopter was requested and deployed, but not actually used. Helicopters that are being used in this context have been supplied by the water company, but an RAF helicopter was requested and was deployed.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I join colleagues in thanking our incredibly brave firefighters, including those from West Yorkshire, and I do hope that the Minister will reassess their funding situation. Will he join Kirklees Council in the advice that it has given to people in the light of the extremely hot weather at the moment? I am talking about its advice on disposable barbecues, which is that people should not use them, or that if they do use them, they should ensure that they dispose of them safely?

Mr Hurd: Yes, I wholly understand and support what the hon. Lady says. Coming back to an earlier point, this is a time when people have to exercise some common sense. We know what the conditions are like and we know the risks associated with these products. Public bodies are putting out plenty of good sensible common sense advice about how to manage and reduce the risk in these circumstances and we should follow it.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): We all salute the fantastic work of the firefighters. Has the Minister yet discussed with DEFRA the need to look after the moorlands, because the impact on wildlife will obviously be devastating?

Mr Hurd: The environmental damage associated with these fires is terrible. The hon. Lady will understand that my priority at the moment is to support the emergency services in managing the short-term situation and in getting it under control. On the longer-term issues,
including the one that she is talking about, and the conversations that need to take place between the Home Office and other Departments, including DEFRA, those will happen.

June European Council

4.43 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement on last week’s European Council.

The focus of this Council was migration, and there were also important conclusions on security and defence. The UK made a substantive contribution on both, and our continued co-operation after we have left the EU will be in everyone’s interests, helping to ensure the long-term prosperity and security of the whole continent. The consequences of mass uncontrolled immigration are one of the most serious challenges confronting Europe today. The problem is felt especially acutely by countries on the Mediterranean and the Aegean, which are often where migrants first arrive, but this is a shared challenge, which affects us all. More than anything, the situation is a tragedy for the migrants themselves, thousands of whom have now lost their lives. At the core of all our efforts must be trying to prevent others from doing so.

The UK has long argued for a comprehensive, whole-of-route approach to tackling migration, and the Council agreed actions in each of the three areas that we have championed. First, there will be more work upstream to reduce the number of people who undertake such perilous journeys in the first place. This includes providing more opportunities in the countries where economic migrants are coming from, and helping to ensure that refugees claim asylum in the first safe country that they reach. To support this, the UK will continue to invest for the long term in education, jobs and services, both in countries of origin and transit.

We are also committed to the second tranche of the EU Facility for Refugees in Turkey, provided that we can agree an appropriate mechanism for managing the funds. We made a further commitment at this Council of €15 million to support the EU Trust Fund for Africa. Both are delivering on the UK’s call for more support for countries of transit and origin on the main routes into Europe, which is vital if we are to achieve the solutions we need to mass uncontrolled migration. Alongside our economic development and humanitarian support, we have also been stepping up our communications effort upstream so that more potential migrants understand the grave dangers of the journeys they might undertake and the criminal people smugglers who are waiting to exploit them.

Secondly, there will be more work to distinguish between genuine refugees and illegal economic migrants. This includes exploring the concept of regional disembarkation platforms. It was agreed at the Council that these could be established on a voluntary basis. Key to their success would be operating in full respect of international law and without creating a pull factor for further migration. There is clearly much more work to be done, with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organisation for Migration, to establish whether such proposals are practically and legally viable, but we do need to be prepared to look again at new solutions, given the gravity and intractability of this challenge.

Thirdly, there will be further efforts to strengthen borders to help to prevent illegal migration. Last week I agreed with Prime Minister Tsipras of Greece that we...
would work towards a new action plan of UK support for Greek and European efforts, including a further Border Force patrol vessel to work with the Greek coastguard. The UK now has law enforcement officers in 17 EU and African countries as part of our organised immigration crime taskforce. UK and French officers are also working together to build links between counter-trafficking agencies in Nigeria and Niger to strengthen this key border on the central route. I am keen that we should replicate this model with other states.

This is a challenge that faces the whole of our continent. As I said at the Council, we will continue playing our full part in working together with the EU to meet that challenge both now and after we have left, for that is in our national interest and in the interests of Europe as a whole.

The same is true for security and defence, which was why at this Council I made the case for a new security partnership between the UK and the EU after we have left. We have seen over recent weeks and months that Russia and other hostile state and non-state actors are trying to sow disunity, destabilise our democracies and test our resolve. We must work together to adapt our current defences to the new normal, and take responsibility for protecting international norms and institutions. In this context, I thanked our European partners for their solidarity in the wake of the appalling nerve agent attack in Salisbury. The unprecedented co-ordinated expulsion of undeclared Russian intelligence officers demonstrated our unity in response to this kind of disregard for global norms and rules that poses a threat to us all.

At the March Council, we agreed to do more to strengthen our resilience against such threats. Since then, the UK has led work with our European partners to propose a package of measures to step up our strategic communications against online disinformation, strengthen our capabilities against cyber-security threats and further reduce the threat from hostile intelligence activities. This Council agreed measures in all these areas, including an action plan by December that must go even further in co-ordinating our response to the challenge of disinformation.

This effort to adapt our defences to protecting international norms should also enable us to respond robustly to events beyond Europe when they threaten our security interests, so this Council welcomed the agreement reached by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in The Hague last week, enabling the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons use. The Council reinforced this by agreeing with President Macron and myself in calling for the adoption of a new EU sanctions regime to address the use and proliferation of chemical weapons. The Council also agreed to roll over current sanctions on Russia in the light of its failure to fully implement the Minsk agreements in Ukraine. In the context of online threats from the full range of state and non-state actors, President Macron and I joined together in pushing for further action to tackle illegal online content, especially terrorist content.

Finally, on security, we looked ahead to our NATO summit next week, which will be an important moment to demonstrate western unity. The NATO Secretary-General joined this discussion at the Council, where we agreed that Europe must take greater responsibility for its own security while complementing and reinforcing the activities of NATO. Far too few of our Allies are meeting the commitment to spend 2% of GDP on defence. At this Council, I urged them to do so, in order that, together, we can meet the full range of targets that challenge our interests. For our own part, we have the biggest defence budget in Europe and the biggest in NATO after the United States. We are investing more than £179 billion on new equipment. That means, among other things, new aircraft carriers and submarines for the Navy, new cutting-edge F-35B aircraft for the RAF, and new Ajax armoured vehicles for the Army. We are leading throughout NATO, whether that is through deployed forces in the Mediterranean, air policing in eastern Europe, or our troops providing an enhanced forward presence in Estonia.

We are operating with our allies to defend our interests all over the world. In April, RAF aircraft took action to degrade the Syrian regime's chemical weapons capability and deter their future use. Over 1,000 personnel are deployed in the fight against Daesh, and we are the second largest contributor to the coalition air campaign in Iraq and Syria. In Africa, UK troops have built and now operate a hospital in South Sudan supporting the UN mission there. They are training security forces in Nigeria, and our Chinook helicopters are deploying to Mali in support of the French this week. Two Royal Navy vessels are deployed in Asia in support of sanctions enforcement on North Korea, working closely with the US, Japan and others, with another to follow—the first Royal Navy deployments to the Pacific since 2013. Our submarines are silently patrolling the seas, giving us a nuclear deterrent every minute of every hour, as they have done for 50 years. Our modernising defence programme will ensure that our capabilities remain as potent in countering the threats of tomorrow as they are in keeping us safe today. We are the leading military power in Europe, with the capabilities to protect our people, defend our interests and project our values, supporting the global rules-based system—and the Government who I lead will ensure that that is exactly how we remain.

Turning to Brexit, I updated my fellow leaders on the negotiations, and the 27 other member states welcomed the further progress that had been made on the withdrawal agreement. With the exception of the protocol relating to Northern Ireland, we now have agreement or are close to doing so. There remain some real differences between us and the European Commission on Northern Ireland. So, on the protocol on Northern Ireland, I want to be very clear. We have put forward proposals and will produce further proposals so that if a temporary backstop is needed, there will be no hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. We are absolutely committed to the avoidance of such a border, and we are equally committed to the avoidance of a hard border between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Northern Ireland is an integral part of our country and we will never accept the imposition of a border within our United Kingdom.

We all agreed that we must now urgently intensify and accelerate the pace of negotiations on our future relationship. I warned EU leaders that I do not think this Parliament will approve the withdrawal agreement in the autumn unless we have clarity about our future
relationship alongside it. I will hold a meeting of the Cabinet at Chequers on Friday, and we will publish our White Paper on the future partnership with the EU next week. The EU and its member states will want to consider our proposals seriously. We both need to show flexibility to build the deep relationship after we have left that is in the interests of both our peoples. Our White Paper will set out detailed proposals for a sustainable and close future relationship between the UK and the EU—a partnership that means that the UK will leave the single market and customs union, but a partnership which supports our shared prosperity and security. It will mark an important step in delivering the decision of the British people. I commend this statement to the House.

4.54 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement. The statement was nearly 2,000 words, and all the Prime Minister says on Brexit is that we need “clarity about our future relationship”.

Yes, we do—we have been waiting for over two years for any clarity from this Government.

Let me first address the issue of migration. I hope that the whole House shares my concern about the direction in which those on the hard right seem determined to take Europe’s migration and asylum policy. There was evidence of that only a few weeks ago when the new Italian Interior Minister exploited the plight of 600 migrant refugees on the rescue ship Aquarius to make a callous political point. That incident has made it clear that, more than ever, we need strong leadership across Europe to uphold the right to asylum and treat all migrants with dignity and respect. It is right that EU countries should help migrants rescued in the Mediterranean and also take action to alleviate the burden on Italy and Greece. What commitments or support has the Prime Minister made or offered in that respect?

We understand that the EU plan now is to swiftly explore the idea of processing centres in north Africa. Can the Prime Minister confirm whether any non-European Union countries have indicated that they would sign up to that deal? In the face of a very worrying surge in far-right rhetoric across the EU, I urge the Prime Minister to stand up for humanitarian values and ensure that Britain is on the right side of this debate, ready to stand up to those who try to use the plight and suffering of tens of thousands of people to incite division and hate anywhere across this continent. On the issue of security and challenging disinformation, I look forward to the December action plan and to debating the NATO summit next week.

When it comes to Brexit, this Government have mishandled the negotiations every step of the way. Another summit has gone and another opportunity has been missed. The division and infighting in the Cabinet is having a debilitating effect on this country, and threatens jobs and communities in every part of the UK. I do not envy the Prime Minister as she prepares for her Chequers sleepover. She has many loud and challenging disinformation, I look forward to the December action plan and to debating the NATO summit next week.

We look forward to the much-vaunted third way on customs that the Prime Minister hopes will unite her Cabinet, because the current chaos at the heart of government leaves us facing crucial unanswered questions. First, will UK trade be greater outside a customs union? If the Government believe that it will, can they show us how they reached that conclusion? In recent days, one major business after another has lined up to say that it is vital for Britain to be in a customs union, as have many trade unions. The Government’s published impact assessments show that potential new trade deals come nowhere near replacing the advantages of being in a customs union, leaving every region and every nation worse off. What evidence do this Government have to suggest that rejecting any form of customs union with our biggest trading partner is the best way of protecting jobs here in Britain? Even the NHS is now having to plan for multiple scenarios because there is no clarity from Government.

Secondly, how do the Government intend to prevent a hard border in Ireland if we are not in a customs union? They say they have been working on finding “flexible and imaginative solutions”, so where are those solutions? The people of Northern Ireland deserve honesty.

Thirdly, what will our future relationship with our biggest trading partner look like? The problem is that the Prime Minister is stuck in the middle of two warring factions, but she now needs to pick a side. Does she want—[Interruption.]

The question is quite simply: does she want a close trading relationship with the EU, with aligned rights and regulations, or does she believe in the visions of those on her Benches who see Britain’s future as a low-regulated, low-investment tax haven?

Fourthly, will potential options for Britain’s future immigration policy be included in the Brexit White Paper? We know freedom of movement will change when we leave the EU, but we are still no clearer about what will come next. Recent figures show that migration of EU nationals is continuing to fall, with some sectors suffering shortages, including in the national health service.

Finally, is the Prime Minister still confident she can get a deal? At this stage, it is not clear that the Prime Minister can even get a deal with her Cabinet, which is why—after two years—the White Paper is nowhere to be seen. The divisions and open warfare at the highest levels of her Government are holding this country back. Even her own Cabinet members are openly saying a deal cannot be done before the transition period, and they are already saying that the transition period will have to be extended.

The Prime Minister has for too long hidden behind a series of soundbites, including “No deal is better than a bad deal.” No deal is a bad deal and would represent historic failure. The Prime Minister must choose: will she rein in the egos of her Cabinet, or negotiate a deal that works for the people of this country and those worried about their jobs, their future and their communities?

The Prime Minister: First, the right hon. Gentleman talked about the issues raised in relation to migration. As I said, uncontrolled migration and the numbers of people we have seen attempting to come to Europe, some of whom have lost their lives in that attempt, do pose a serious challenge to Europe, and we have been working with our European colleagues to be able to address these issues.
The right hon. Gentleman talked about the right to claim asylum. In 2016, when I went to the United Nations, I set out the three principles that we believe underlie these issues: first, that people should claim asylum in the first safe country that they come to; secondly, that it should be possible to differentiate better between economic migrants and refugees, which I think will enable more support to be available for refugees; and thirdly, that countries have a right to be able to defend their borders, but they must also accept returns of those individuals who have gone illegally elsewhere and should be returned to those countries.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the alleviation of the burden on Italy and Greece. We have been working for some time now with both Italy and Greece in a number of ways to alleviate the burden on them. In particular, we have had Border Force staff working in Greece to help in terms of the processes there for claiming asylum and identifying refugees and others. We have been working similarly in Italy, but also working, as I indicated in my statement in relation to the organised immigration crime taskforce, to ensure that we are identifying those people-smugglers who are the people behind the misery so that so many individual migrants find themselves subjected to.

These people-smugglers have no care for the humanity—for the lives—of the people that they are dealing with; they are quite happy to put them into boats that they know will sink and send them off from the Libyan coast. That is why we have been part of the search and rescue operation in the Mediterranean and, as I say, we are working to identify those smuggling groups. As I said in my statement, I agreed with Prime Minister Tsipras that we are going to work towards further action—a new action plan of UK support for Greek and European efforts—and that will include a further Border Force patrol vessel, which will be working with the Greek coastguard.

The right hon. Gentleman then came on to reference the issue of Brexit. He talked about the issue of whether or not there had been progress on Brexit. I have to say that, at virtually every stage, Labour Members have said that there was no progress on Brexit; at every stage, we have delivered. They said we would not deliver article 50—we did. They said we would not, but I laid out our plans at Lancaster House, at Florence, at Munich and in the Mansion House speech. We got agreement on phase 1 in December, and we got agreement in March to an implementation period. We are on schedule. The question is: why does the Labour party spend all its time trying to frustrate Brexit and stop the vote of the British people?

The right hon. Gentleman asked about trade. Yes, we do want to ensure that we continue to have a good trading relationship with the European Union, but we also want to ensure that we have an independent trade policy that allows us to get good trade deals with the rest of the world. That will be for the prosperity and benefit of people and jobs here in this country.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about the national health service. Well, months ago Labour were complaining that the national health service was not preparing for a no deal, and now they are complaining that it is. Labour really need to get themselves straight on what they are talking about. When it comes to getting a position straight, the right hon. Gentleman wanted to trigger article 50 the day after the referendum, but now he refuses to rule out a second referendum. It is not just a question of who in the Labour party agrees with who else; the right hon. Gentleman cannot even agree with himself on his Brexit policy.

Finally, the right hon. Gentleman said that I should pick a side. I am very clear: I have picked the side of the British people, and they will be the ones I deliver for.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind the House that, in accordance with long-standing convention, right hon. and hon. Members who came into the Chamber after the Prime Minister began her statement should not expect to be called to question her about it. More widely, if I am to have any chance of accommodating the understandably extensive interest in the matter, there will be a premium upon brevity, which is now to be brilliantly exemplified by Mr John Redwood.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will the Prime Minister table urgently a full free trade agreement, covering both goods and services, and ask the EU whether they want that or no deal? Either way, we must take back control of our laws, our money and our borders.

The Prime Minister: We will be taking back the control that my right hon. Friend sets out; that is what people voted for in the referendum, and that is what we will deliver. We will be setting out, in greater detail than we have done so far, our proposals for that trade agreement with the European Union, making very clear to it the options that now lie on the table.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for advance sight of her statement. How embarrassing it must have been for her last week in Brussels, when the most oft-heard words were, “Time is running out.” We learnt that this year the Brexit Secretary has spent only four hours in talks with Michel Barnier. The EU’s chief negotiator has warned that “huge and serious divergence remains, in particular on Ireland and Northern Ireland.”

The UK is inching ever closer to a cliff edge, but the Prime Minister cannot even negotiate with her own Cabinet, let alone—[Interruption.] I hear the guffawing and laughter coming from the Conservative Benches, including from the Prime Minister. They should reflect on the fact that this is about the jobs and security of our people; they deserve to have these important matters taken seriously, not treated like a Punch and Judy show by the Conservatives.

In a worrying development, EU officials yesterday warned that the deal might not be ready until December at the earliest. The Irish Prime Minister summed up the situation perfectly when he said:

“I think it would have been helpful to have that white paper two years ago. You would have thought they’d have had that before people voted.”

To go to a European Council meeting with nothing to negotiate on and then to come back and hold a Cabinet summit beggars belief. Talk about putting the cart before the horse. On Friday, the Prime Minister will face her Cabinet. Goodness knows where she will be with
Brexit this time next week. More than two years on from the Brexit vote, we are no clearer on what the Government want—two years wasted, with no vision and no plan. The result is that jobs and investment are at risk from lack of a coherent plan. Where is the leadership? Where is the recognition of the responsibility that the Prime Minister has to protect jobs? Mr Speaker, you could not make this up. No wonder businesses, communities and the devolved Administrations are speaking out.

Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether December is her new deal deadline for negotiations? Does she think it is right that NHS England is preparing for no deal and working to secure medicine and equipment she cannot give simple reassurances? To protect the NHS and to protect jobs and investment, will she commit now to keeping the United Kingdom in the single market and in the customs union to protect our communities?

The Prime Minister: I set out clearly the progress made in our talks since we triggered article 50. The right hon. Gentleman says it is wrong for the national health service to prepare for no deal. Actually, it is right that contingency arrangements are being put in place across the Government, because the negotiations have not yet been completed. The European Union itself—we agreed with this—is looking to the October deadline. As I said in my statement—if he noticed that paragraph in my statement—I believe it is right that, when this House looks at the details of the withdrawal agreement, it should have sufficient detail about our future relationship with the European Union to be able to make that decision. Finally, he talks about role of the United Kingdom and the importance of jobs in the future. I say very simply to him—I have said it before, but I will continue to repeat it—that if he is interested in jobs in Scotland then he should make sure that Scotland stays in the United Kingdom.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): First, I congratulate my right hon. Friend on Royal Assent being granted to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which repeals the European Communities Act 1972 in line with the wishes of the voters in the referendum. This repeal, as my right hon. Friend knows, means no freedom of movement, no customs union, no single market and no European Court of Justice. It is a sovereign Act returning to this country self-government and is the law of the land. There are, however, some disturbing reports in parts of the press that the Government may have in mind proposals for some form of legal re-entry into a form European unity of some description—for example, in the context of the European economic area. This is preposterous, and I simply ask my right hon. Friend to dismiss those reports, as they are completely unfounded and would undermine trust in our democracy if they were true.

The Prime Minister: In relation to the point my hon. Friend makes about the EEA, I have been clear from the start that that is one of the things the European Commission suggested was on the table. The EEA is not right, because it would not deliver—particularly in the form the European Commission proposed it—on the vote of the referendum and the vote of the British people.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Since the Prime Minister has now wisely accepted that we would be willing to respect the remit of the European Court of Justice when it comes to co-operation on security and EU agencies, will she please explain to the House why she is so opposed in principle to doing the same when it comes to participation in the internal market and the customs union?

The Prime Minister: I set out in my Mansion House speech that if we are a member of an EU agency that is governed by the European Court of Justice and we continue to have a role in it, that of course has implications for the actions of that agency. That is different from the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, which will be ended in the United Kingdom.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): People are fed up with not just Brexit but fudge, so on Friday the Cabinet must agree and settle its policy on Brexit. May I assure the Prime Minister that if the agreement meets the needs of British business she will command support not just across the Government Benches but across the country at large?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for her comments and I assure her that that is exactly what the Cabinet intends to do on Friday.

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): In managing the internal debate on Brexit in the Government, they have developed a very flexible, elastic approach to the idea of collective Cabinet responsibility, even more than in the Government the Prime Minister and I were a part of. What are the red lines that Ministers cannot now cross for fear of being dismissed for disloyalty?

The Prime Minister: That is a very interesting contribution from the right hon. Gentleman. I seem to remember when we were in the coalition Government one or two occasions when I woke up as Home Secretary to discover statements he had made from his position, which certainly did not reflect Cabinet collective responsibility.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Will Brexit be recognisable as Brexit?

The Prime Minister: There has been much jocularity around the term “Brexit means Brexit,” but it does mean Brexit. People want to ensure that we take back control of our borders and our laws, and that we no longer continue to send vast sums of money to the European Union each year. We will be coming out of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, but we will be ensuring that we are able to trade with the European Union and set an independent trade policy that enables us to negotiate good trade deals around the rest of the world.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): This weekend, the Prime Minister criticised the Commission’s approach to security, and I think the Commission is being too rigid, but I have to say to her that her red lines—that she just reaffirmed—on the European Court of Justice and on the charter of fundamental rights are also causing huge problems in getting a security deal. Frankly, from the outside, it looks as though no one is listening to the police. Will she now accept that we are running out of time, and will she confirm that she will not stick with those red lines if they get in the way of a security partnership?
The Prime Minister: I set out our ambition on a security partnership in my Munich speech and negotiations have been started with the European Union on this particular issue. What I want to see in the security partnership for the future is our ability to maintain operational capabilities. That is not something that is being put in jeopardy by the position that the Government are taking on the European Court of Justice. We are working and will work to ensure that those operational capabilities are maintained in the future.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): In recognising that this deal will probably not be completed until the very last minute, as we have seen in previous deals, I urge my right hon. Friend not to be too specific until the very last minute, as we have seen in previous negotiations. It is absolutely right that in a negotiation, said that we would not be giving a running commentary and to keep the negotiating hand that she will need in those negotiations, ever mindful of the fact that this country has been incredibly successful in attracting inward investment, because this has been the place to invest. I urge her to have that in her mind for the long-term future of the country.

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend. He may recall that right at the beginning of this process I said that we would not be giving a running commentary on negotiations. It is absolutely right that in a negotiation, there are certain aspects on which it is necessary to ensure that we have flexibility. On his second point, he is absolutely right: we continue to see international companies investing in and creating new jobs in this country. That is because this is a great place to do business and it will continue to be so.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): To lose one unworkable customs variant may be regarded as misfortune, but to lose both looks like carelessness. Would it not be far simpler if the Prime Minister just admitted that it is impossible to avoid a hard border in Ireland unless we are in the single market and the customs union?

The Prime Minister: No. I will not accept that, because it is not the case. We can do it, and we can do it in a variety of ways, but we remain committed to no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): It is very clear that a no-deal Brexit would carry a high risk, both for our economy and our security, so I urge my right hon. Friend to continue to listen to British businesses and other stakeholders and to continue fighting for practical and pragmatic solutions that safeguard jobs and security.

The Prime Minister: We have indeed been listening to British business. We have also listened to European businesses that are investing here in the United Kingdom. I want to see a good Brexit deal, which not only ensures that we maintain prosperity and jobs here in the UK, but gives us the freedom to be able to extend those trade deals around the world in our interests, and not in the interests of Brussels, as has been the case in the past.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): If we are to be legally bound by the withdrawal agreement on the £35 billion to £40 billion and other issues such as the backstop on Northern Ireland, surely we need something more than clarity about our future relationship alongside it. Surely we need the same level of legal certainty, as with the withdrawal agreement before this Parliament voted the money through.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman raises an important point. We have always seen our agreement on the future relationship and the withdrawal agreement running alongside each other. That is why I am clear, as is the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, that when the House considers the withdrawal agreement, it will need to have sufficient detail about the future relationship to be able to judge that. We see the withdrawal agreement and the future relationship as linked. The EU itself has said that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that at the end of the implementation period the United Kingdom will leave the customs union and will no longer be subject to the common external tariff?

The Prime Minister: We are going to be leaving the customs union. We have, of course, as my hon. Friend will be well aware, set out the alternative proposal for a backstop in relation to the situation in Northern Ireland and Ireland which would come into play were there any delay in putting our future customs relationship into full operation and into place. I am clear that we should be doing everything we can to ensure that at the end of December 2020 our future relationship, including our future customs relationship, is in place such that the backstop is not necessary.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): How likely is it that our customs arrangements will not be in place by the end of the transition period?

The Prime Minister: As I just said, we are working to ensure that they can and will be in place.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Rather than listening to arbitrary red lines, set down, as we have just heard, by Members such as those for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and for Wokingham (John Redwood), will the Prime Minister do what Conservative Prime Ministers over the ages have done and find a pragmatic, sensible and flexible Brexit that delivers on the referendum result of two years ago, which we have done through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, while protecting business, jobs, the economy and entrepreneurs? If we do otherwise we will not be thanked for the mess we end up in.

The Prime Minister: I and the whole Government are working for a Brexit arrangement and deal that will ensure prosperity for our economy into the future and a Brexit deal behind which the whole country can unite.

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): Are there any circumstances in which the Prime Minister would support the extension of either the article 50 period or the transition period?

The Prime Minister: We will be leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019.
Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): On a different subject, will the Prime Minister accept that, while she has secured the future of the nuclear deterrent submarines, and while she has invested, rightly and heavily, in intelligence, security and cyber, if a black hole is found in the conventional defence budget, we will need to fill it, if we are to fulfil the ambitious programme she set out in her statement?

The Prime Minister: As my right hon. Friend knows, and as I referred to in my statement, we are committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence, but we are also committed to increasing the amount we spend on defence by 0.5% above inflation every year, which I did not refer to in my statement. Then there is the £179 billion we will be spending on equipment. The whole point of the modernising defence programme is to look at the defence of the future and the threats we now face, and to make sure that we have the capabilities to meet those threats.

Maria Eagle (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): On Northern Ireland, the Prime Minister said: “I want to be very clear. We have put forward proposals and will produce further proposals”. Could she be a little clearer now and tell the House what those further proposals are?

The Prime Minister: We will publish next week a White Paper with details about the proposals for our future relationship, and that will include matters relating to customs and Northern Ireland.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Michel Barnier tells us that we should not cherry-pick, yet we import 850,000 cars from Germany every year, we drink more champagne than the French and we import a lot of cherries from Spain. We will want to continue to do that post-Brexit. Does my right hon. Friend believe as I do that it is in the interests of the EU, where a lot of countries have high unemployment, to do a trade deal with the UK?

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely in the interests of the other countries in the European Union, which will be remaining in the European Union, to do that trade deal with the UK. I have always said that I think a good deal for us would be a good deal for them.

Mr Speaker: As the hon. Member for Ribble Valley has just referred to cherries, it seems timely for me to call Joanna Cherry.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker. This is, from my point of view, one occasion on which cherry-picking is in order.

We are advised that the EU27 are so united in their approach to Brexit that they spent only 10 minutes discussing it last week. Can the Prime Minister give us an estimate of how long she thinks the members of her Cabinet will spend discussing matters next Friday at Chequers before they reach agreement on Brexit?

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet will meet, and the Cabinet will reach an agreement on this important matter, which is in our national interest.
The Prime Minister: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that his interpretation is not correct. In a no-deal situation, it will of course be up to the United Kingdom to determine what it does in relation to the border in Northern Ireland.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): As we get closer to setting out our priorities for future trade relationships with our European partners, we have reasonably heard more from business, including the fact that modern integrated supply chains call for those relationships to be as frictionless as possible. That is certainly a message that the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee has heard, not just in relation to the automotive industry but in relation to pharmaceuticals, food and drink, and aerospace. Does the Prime Minister agree that in this matter, business has been consistent?

The Prime Minister: Certainly it is the case that business has been expressing its views to Government and elsewhere on these matters for some time, but we should recognise that there are businesses around the UK that have integrated supply chains with countries in the EU, businesses that will be exporting to the EU without those integrated supply chains, and businesses that will be exporting to the rest of the world and who want to see us negotiating trade deals around the rest of the world. We are looking for a deal and deals in future trade that are in the best of the interests of the UK, and that includes business and jobs here.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Jobs at risk, scientific research threatened, and now that includes business and jobs here.

The Prime Minister: Of course it is right that, as I said earlier, across Government preparations are being made for every contingency, which includes the possibility of no deal being reached with the EU. The hon. Lady talks about issues relating to jobs: we are continuing to see new jobs being created in this country by firms that are investing here and looking ahead to a bright future for Britain and for our economy.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): After a very good lunch with my right hon. Friend, I asked her whether leaving the EU meant leaving, no ifs, no buts; she gave me that assurance. Will she very kindly give my hon. Friend and his constituents to be very clear that we will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019. As we do that, we are negotiating a future relationship with the member states that will remain in the EU, which will continue to ensure jobs and prosperity here in the UK but also enable us to increase jobs and prosperity as a result of the trade deals we will be free to make as an independent trade country with countries around the rest of the world.

The Prime Minister: We will be leaving the EU; I want my hon. Friend and his constituents to be very clear that we will be leaving the EU on 29 March 2019. We do not do that, we are negotiating a future relationship with the member states that will remain in the EU, which will continue to ensure jobs and prosperity here in the UK but also enable us to increase jobs and prosperity as a result of the trade deals we will be free to make as an independent trade country with countries around the rest of the world.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The Prime Minister mentioned regional disembarkation platforms, but what will she do specifically to increase capacity for refugees to be processed closer to conflicts and increase the number of refugees eligible for resettlement, thereby creating safe and legal routes for people fleeing war and persecution?

The Prime Minister: We have already taken steps in the work we do to resettle Syrian refugees here in the UK. We work with the UNHCR and the International Organisation for Migration in region to ensure the conditions are met and we can process those claims and cases as well as possible.

The hon. Lady mentioned the regional disembarkation centres and platforms that have been talked about. The precise point of those, which is why the discussions are taking place with the UNHCR and the IOM, is to ensure that people can be prevented from making the dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean that lead to loss of lives, and that proper circumstances can be set up in which their situation can be assessed. That is why we must look at the practicality and legal viability of this, but it is important that we work with the IOM and UNHCR in doing so.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I speak to constituents who voted leave and constituents who voted remain, and they are pretty much all of the same opinion: that this Government and this House as a whole should work towards delivering on the will of the people. Will my right hon. Friend reassure me of the Government’s willingness to accelerate these negotiations, and say more about the response from the EU Commission and the EU leaders in that regard?

The Prime Minister: We stand absolutely ready to accelerate those negotiations, and of course the EU at its Council meeting last week also agreed it was necessary to accelerate them. It takes two sides to do this: we are ready; they should be, too.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, investment in new models, equipment and facilities in the UK was just £347 million in the first half of the year compared with £647 million in the same period of 2017, and that is on top of foreign direct investment plummeting by 90% since 2016. This is not “Project Fear”; it is happening right here, right now, to our jobs and to our economy. Does the Prime Minister not recognise that if she were to commit to the European economic area, she would stop the rot?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman looks at foreign direct investment in the United Kingdom, he will see that we remain the No. 1 destination for FDI in Europe.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that she believes that we can reach a deep and special partnership with the European Union that safeguards and improves our economic prosperity up and down the country and in Redditch?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that assurance. We are looking not just to reach that deep and special partnership but to ensure as we do...
so—through other steps that the Government are taking, such as our modern industrial strategy—that we are a country that works for everyone and that the advantages and benefits of our future trade relationships are felt up and down the country, including in Redditch.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Children are increasingly the victims of cross-border crime, cyber-crime and trafficking, and our ability to ensure that we protect them and bring criminals to justice depends on our relations with other European criminal justice agencies. Will the Prime Minister guarantee that children will remain her first priority in the deal that she negotiates on security, if necessary by accepting the continued jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, at least for a time, to ensure that those criminal justice instruments can continue to protect children?

The Prime Minister: We are looking to maintain our operational capabilities, and the hon. Lady is right to say that there will be many cases involving the protection of children. We are taking many steps, not just with the EU. I referred in my statement to the steps we have been taking with France, with President Macron, in relation to online abuse and particularly to terrorist content. We have also been working on the wider issue of the inappropriate use of materials online. We will continue to ensure that we are working towards having those operational capabilities, so that we can do as the hon. Lady asks and continue to protect children and others from criminal activity across borders.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The terrorist threat to the UK and across Europe is becoming more complex and is evolving quickly. Does the Prime Minister agree that it is in the UK’s national interest and in the interest of the European Union to come to an agreement quickly on shared security arrangements as we prepare to leave the European Union?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The focus in these questions is usually on our future economic partnership, but the security partnership is equally important. As he suggests, that covers not only terrorist activity across borders but the activity of organised crime gangs and others, as well as online activity, as I have just said. We are confident that we will be able to reach a partnership on our security relationships because that is in the operational interests of all the EU27 states as well as of the UK.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): Over the past weeks, Airbus, BMW and Siemens have echoed the warning of the trade unions that the Government’s Brexit strategy is putting thousands of jobs at risk. Will the Prime Minister listen to business and to the trade unions, and commit to keeping the UK in a customs union?

The Prime Minister: I have said on many occasions that we will be leaving the customs union, but we will of course be putting in place customs arrangements with the European Union that will match the ambition of our trade relationship in the future.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): My constituents were very clear on what they were voting for in 2016, and that would not be delivered by a Norway-style agreement. Can the Prime Minister guarantee that, whatever our future arrangement with the EU is, it will not circumscribe our ability to strike free trade deals or to end free movement?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend makes absolutely clear, the future relationship must enable us to strike those trade deals and have an independent trade policy, and also to bring an end to free movement.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The squabbling, back-stabbing and leadership positioning in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet is marching us towards a no deal Brexit. Will she and the Leader of the Opposition accept that the only way of getting us out of this mess is, as advocated by the British Medical Association and members of the Unite union, to provide the people with a final say on the deal and a chance to exit from Brexit?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman might not have noticed, but at the last general election, around 80% of people voted for parties that supported our leaving the European Union.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) rose—

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: Ah, the Northamptonshire rivalry—Socrates and his follower. Who is to be? I call Mr Philip Hollobone.

Mr Hollobone: The press speculation today is that the Prime Minister is in receipt of senior civil service advice that the European Union will not accept a bespoke deal. For any deal to be better than no deal, will the Prime Minister confirm that it needs to be a bespoke arrangement to suit the special needs of the fifth-largest economy in the world? Will she also confirm that we will not be forced to take an off-the-shelf option, such as the Norwegian model, and that the Department for Exiting the European Union and the Department for International Trade have been working their socks off to ensure that we get the bespoke arrangement that our country needs?

The Prime Minister: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. In fact, looking at the operation of the European Union in terms of its trade negotiations and the economic partnerships that it forms with a variety of countries around the world, each of those is a bespoke arrangement, and it is right that the UK’s deal will be a bespoke arrangement. We are ambitious as to what that can contain, and I look forward to receiving the same degree of ambition from the European Union.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister referred to the discussions with NATO’s Secretary-General, which are welcome, and mentioned Russia’s failure to implement the Minsk agreement and the extension of EU sanctions against Russia. Was any concern expressed about what President Trump might do in his bilateral meeting with President Putin and about the danger of him selling out Ukraine and therefore European interests?
Tom Pursglove: Does my right hon. Friend agree that our holistic approach of predominately focusing our aid in the region means that we maximise the number of refugees that we help while minimising the number of perilous journeys undertaken? Is she encouraging other European leaders to follow suit?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. At the beginning of the situation in Syria, the UK took a view that it was right to help people in region through our aid budget to help far more people there, and that is exactly what we have done. It also means that people are not encouraged to make dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean at the hands of people smugglers. Our position is absolutely right, and I have encouraged others to do the same.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister believe that frictionless trade and regulatory alignment are a particular concern of the fashionable metropolitan elite or a priority for manufacturing across the nation?

The Prime Minister: As we look for our future trading relationship, I have been clear that what the hon. Lady and I have referred to as “as frictionless trade as possible” is one of our objectives in the negotiations.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Is it not the case that the British Government would find themselves in an extremely weak and vulnerable position if they sought to negotiate the detail of our NHS and whether the money is coming out of the budget for treating patients?

The Prime Minister: It is entirely right and proper that, like every organisation, the NHS considers what future contingencies should be. The NHS is no different from any other organisation.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): In this brave new world, does the Prime Minister expect us to remain a member of the European agency Europol?

The Prime Minister: As I have said in today’s statement and previously, we are looking to negotiate a security partnership that enables us to maintain operational capabilities. I have previously cited Europol as one of the agencies of which we may wish to be a member. We are a significant contributor to Europol, and I think it is in the interest of the EU27 that we are able to continue to have a relationship with Europol in the future.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Does the Prime Minister accept that future UK immigration policy will have to form part of the overall negotiations on the future UK-EU relationship? Will we finally see a decent outline of her immigration proposals in next week’s White Paper?

The Prime Minister: One of the things people voted for when they voted to leave the European Union was to bring an end to free movement, and that will be the case. The hon. Gentleman may be aware that the Migration Advisory Committee has been asked to advise the Home Office on the question of the contribution made to our economy by workers from within the European Union, and it will be reporting on that later this year.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has recognised that, in the national interest, we will need to continue to recognise the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in a number of areas after the end of the implementation period at the end of 2020. Does she agree that data privacy regulation is one of those areas—she has acknowledged the importance of that—and that Europol is another? Will she set out some of the other areas in which we will need to continue to recognise that jurisdiction?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I indicated in my Mansion House speech and subsequently that what he says may pertain in future where we continue to remain a member of a European Union agency, but the arrangements for that membership, that partnership, that association would still have to be negotiated.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): Like Northern Ireland, Gibraltar is an integral part of our country. Can the Prime Minister update the House on what progress has been made in negotiations on the Gibraltarian border?

The Prime Minister: Negotiations have been taking place on Gibraltar, and we maintain our steadfast support for the people of Gibraltar. We have been clear that Gibraltar is covered by our exit negotiations. We are committed to fully involving Gibraltar as we exit the EU, and we have been involving the Government of Gibraltar in these matters. We are looking for a deal that works for the whole UK family, and it must work for Gibraltar, too. We support the territorial scope of the draft withdrawal agreement, which explicitly includes Gibraltar.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Prime Minister for standing firm. This morning, in the local press back home, the EU Agriculture Commissioner, Phil Hogan, stated that the Republic of Ireland is preparing
for a no deal Brexit. The Republic of Ireland has notified 70 stakeholders to ready themselves for just that. We would like an accommodation with the EU, but does the EU really want an agreement, or should we prepare for a no deal Brexit?

The Prime Minister: It is right that everyone should make contingency arrangements for all eventualities. That is what the Government are doing here, and it is what others will be doing, too. We are working to get that deal. As I said in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), I believe a deal that is good for the UK will be a deal that is good for the EU27, and we continue to work on that basis.

Infected Blood Inquiry

5.48 pm

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): On 8 February 2018, I announced the appointment of Sir Brian Langstaff to chair the infected blood inquiry. From the outset, Sir Brian has been clear that he is determined to put people at the heart of the inquiry and to ensure an inclusive and transparent process.

Sir Brian and his team conducted a public consultation on the proposed terms of reference for the inquiry, which ran from 2 March to 26 April. They invited contributions via an online questionnaire, email, written correspondence and telephone. The inquiry team also held 15 meetings with groups and individuals across the UK, and Sir Brian is keen for the inquiry to continue to do that as it moves forward.

The inquiry received almost 700 responses to its consultation and Sir Brian, having reflected on those consultation responses, wrote to me on 7 June to advise me of the outcome and of his recommendations for the terms of reference. The terms of reference are comprehensive and reflect the key points made during the consultation.

The geographical scope of the inquiry is UK-wide. The inquiry will look at issues relating to the whole of the UK, as well as regionally. Sir Brian expects the inquiry team to hold regular meetings across the UK. I have therefore consulted, as I am required to do under the Inquiries Act 2005, with the devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales and, in the absence of a Northern Ireland Executive, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who, in turn, consulted the permanent secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Health. The Governments of Scotland and Wales, and my right hon. Friend, were content with Sir Brian’s recommendations, and I am happy to accept his recommendations without amendment. I have written to Sir Brian to confirm this.

The terms of reference have been published and deposited in the Libraries of both Houses today. The inquiry can now formally begin its work; it will start today—2 July 2018. Sir Brian proposes to use groups of experts to assist the inquiry. Those groups would cover all the material fields relevant to the inquiry. Their evidence would be public, transparent and subject to scrutiny. People affected, and other participants to the inquiry, will be able to propose experts and put forward questions to the expert groups.

During the inquiry’s public consultation, views were expressed both for and against the appointment of additional panel members. Some, noting the complex and difficult issues to be examined by the inquiry, wanted a panel of many experts to assist the chair. It is Sir Brian’s view that his proposal for expert groups will achieve the objectives of those who have been in favour of panel members by providing legitimacy and transparency, a diverse range of expertise and, importantly, speed. Sir Brian plans now to discuss this proposed approach with those who will most centrally participate in the inquiry, particularly survivors and the groups representing them, and to ask
them whether, in the light of the proposed approach, there remains any significant wish for him to be joined by a decision-making panel. Sir Brian has asked me to defer a decision on panel members until core participants have been appointed and have had the opportunity to consider the proposed approach.

I am aware that when my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green) met people affected before Christmas last year, many supported the idea of the chair sitting alongside other panel members. I have not lost sight of that, but I think it is only right that I allow Sir Brian time to consult core participants. I therefore do not propose to appoint other panel members at this time, but I will consider the issue once core participants have had an opportunity to look at Sir Brian’s proposed approach. Of course, section 7 of the 2005 Act allows me to make further appointments to the inquiry panel during the course of the inquiry, with the consent of the chair. Speed is of the essence, and I have asked Sir Brian to report back to me as quickly as possible; I will then make my decision on panel members.

Many thousands of people from across the United Kingdom have been affected by this terrible tragedy. Sadly, a number of those affected have died since the inquiry was announced. One of the clearest messages from the inquiry’s consultation was the need for speed. In his letter to me, Sir Brian noted that one respondent to the consultation had said:

“I really hope this Inquiry does not drag on as I would like to live long enough to see the result”.

It is extremely important that the infected blood inquiry can complete its work as quickly as a thorough examination of the facts allows, and this is something that Sir Brian and his team are very aware of.

This inquiry is a priority for the Government, and I have assured Sir Brian that the Cabinet Office will provide all the resources and support that the inquiry needs to meet the demanding timescales that are essential in order to meet the expectations of people affected by this tragedy, who have already waited so long for answers. The inquiry will have much to do over the coming months, and I am sure it will waste no time in getting started. The first stages of the inquiry will be critical for obtaining evidence, including witness statements from people who have been infected and affected. The inquiry will use this evidence to help to uncover what happened and why. It will hold its preliminary hearings in September at Church House, London, where core participants will be able to set out their priorities for the inquiry. My exchange of correspondence with Sir Brian and the full terms of reference have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and I commend this statement to the House.

5.55 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I thank the Minister for his statement and for giving me advance sight of it.

Today’s statement is a sign of progress, but it is also an indicator of how delayed this whole process has been. It is a year since the inquiry was announced and six months since responsibility was, rightly, transferred to the Cabinet Office, yet we are only now getting details of its sittings and terms of reference. The unpleasant and inconvenient truth is that the longer the delays and the longer the grass into which this matter has been kicked, the fewer victims will be around to see justice done—the Minister referred to the testimony of one survivor in his statement. Taken together with other inquiries such as that on Grenfell Tower, where the Government had to chop and change the format numerous times in response to public dissatisfaction, we are given the overall impression that when it comes to public inquiries on public safety or government malfeasance, this Government have wanted to give away as little as possible, as late as possible.

Nevertheless, today we have seen progress. We welcome the statement, the new terms of reference and the start of the inquiry. It will look at issues ranging from what happened at the outset to the response of the Government, the treatment of victims and their families, the question of whether evidence was deliberately destroyed and a possible cover-up mounted, and whether individuals or institutions are to be held responsible. Those terms of reference have been welcomed by those affected, their families and the campaigners supporting them. May I also welcome the Minister’s recognition in his statement that speed is of the essence, given the previous delays?

We also welcome the fact that the inquiry is to be UK-wide, which will overcome the anomaly of previous inquiries or compensation schemes that were dependent on the jurisdiction in which the original contamination took place. We hope that the inquiry can now crack on with its work. Will the Minister confirm that it will be given the finance it needs to follow the evidence and complete its work so that it is unhindered and unrestrained by a lack of resources?

The responsibility in government for sponsoring this inquiry was transferred to the Cabinet Office because the Department of Health was at best conflicted and at worst possibly implicated, albeit perhaps historically. Will the Minister confirm that a clear instruction has gone out—or will go out—from Downing Street that full co-operation is expected from Ministers and officials at the Department of Health and Social Care? Have any mechanisms been put in place to support the inquiry by monitoring the Department’s co-operation in this matter?

We welcome the fact that Sir Brian Langstaff will have expert working groups to advise him. Some campaigners feel that the Penrose inquiry in Scotland suffered from having Lord Penrose sitting on his own, and we note that Sir Brian will make a recommendation to the Minister on additional panel members after consulting the core participants. There had previously been a doubt about the provision of legal aid to the victims and their families for the earlier consultation, so will the Minister confirm that support will be available for those participating in the inquiry itself—both financial support and, where necessary, counselling?

Will the Minister confirm that any claims to commercial confidentiality made by the firms involved or their modern-day successors will not take precedence over the need for the inquiry to get to the truth on behalf of victims? This inquiry now passes into the independent hands of Sir Brian. However, will the Minister indicate whether there will be a mechanism for interim reports to be given to this House, and so to those affected and their families?

Finally, will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the courage, resilience and determination of the surviving affected people and their families who have stayed in
this fight for so long? Will he also join me in paying tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House in the all-party group on haemophilia and contaminated blood, and especially to my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) for her leadership in keeping this matter in the minds of Ministers and the whole House?

Mr Lidington: First, I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s support for the inquiry and for the direction of travel that I have announced today. I am happy to join him in paying particular tribute to the courage and tenacity of the survivors and the organisations that work with them. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Worthing West (Sir Peter Bottomley), who have worked together in a compelling demonstration of cross-party unity and determination to secure justice for the survivors.

On the time taken since the inquiry was announced, I emphasise to the House that the Government have tried consistently to move this inquiry ahead as quickly as possible. It was right that we reflected on the criticisms of the initial idea that the inquiry should be sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care, and that responsibility was therefore switched to the Cabinet Office. It was important to get a judge not only who had the right experience and expertise to take on the task, but who was willing to take it on and could free him or herself for up to two years, full time, to chair the inquiry. Finding the right judge with the willingness and ability to commit time is not always straightforward. Sir Brian has wasted no time: even ahead of his retirement from active duty on the bench in May, he took initial steps to understand the brief. Since his retirement, he has been active in ensuring that he talks directly to survivors’ groups and others. There is no doubt in my mind that he is absolutely committed not only to getting to the truth and securing justice, but to doing so in as speedy a way as possible, given the need to ensure the proper examination of evidence.

Let me turn to the hon. Gentleman’s particular questions. First, on finance, yes the Cabinet Office will provide Sir Brian and the inquiry team with all the resources that they need to do their job effectively.

Secondly, the Prime Minister has made it clear that the Department of Health and Social Care, the national health service and all branches of government should co-operate fully with Sir Brian and the inquiry. It is for the NHS in the devolved areas to take decisions in the light of the devolved Governments’ views, but I wish to make it clear that I have no reason to expect anything other than full co-operation. I know that the Governments in Scotland and Wales are determined to ensure that there is justice and openness and that, at the end of the day, the truth is delivered for survivors.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether measures will be taken to monitor the Department of Health and Social Care. I assure him that there were to be—I do not expect this—the slightest suggestion of a failure to co-operate, the necessary instructions would be given. The Prime Minister’s view on that has been absolutely clear.

The hon. Gentleman asked about legal aid, and I can confirm that we are making it available. We have said that people can claim for the costs of legal representation during the consultation. Under section 44 of the Inquiries Act 2005, I am allowed to determine the power of the chair to make awards for legal funding. Given the exceptional nature and gravity of the infected blood tragedy, I have decided that it is overwhelmingly in the public interest that the Government provide such funding for applicants. Those applicants will not be subject to means-testing.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Penrose inquiry. One problem with that inquiry to which the Scottish campaign groups drew Sir Brian’s attention was that Penrose was assisted as chair by a single medical assessor. Sir Brian’s proposal is for there to be panels of experts representing different areas of expertise that need to be brought to bear in our search for the truth. He proposes that that is the best way, commensurate with the speed required, to ensure that the survivors get to the truth as rapidly as possible.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is the Cabinet Office’s central working assumption about how long this inquiry will take and how much it will cost?

Mr Lidington: Ultimately, such matters are for the chair of the inquiry, because the inquiry will be independent of Government direction once it has been established. Our working assumption is that it may take up to two years, but I do not want in any way to prejudge the decisions that Sir Brian will come to or where the evidence will take the inquiry.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): The infection of patients with hepatitis C and HIV from contaminated blood products is the worst tragedy and scandal in the NHS’s 70-year history in terms of the number of people infected, the ignoring of evidence, and the cover-ups on which we hope light will be brought to bear. As the Minister said, it is almost a year since the inquiry was announced, during which time, sadly, 90 people have died in England, Scotland and Wales and will therefore not get the answers for which they had hoped.

As the Minister mentioned, speed is of the essence, so what steps are the Government taking to avoid the end of the inquiry becoming entangled in a Maxwellisation process, as happened with the Iraq war inquiry? I am sure that the financial support available for legal counsel is welcome, but what financial support will there be to help victims and their families to attend the inquiry? I understand that it will move around the UK, but there will still be costs for families who are struggling.

Another limitation of the Penrose inquiry that was held in Scotland was that it was unable to force witnesses from the Department of Health to attend the inquiry, even though the scandal happened when that Department was responsible for healthcare right across the UK. The Minister referred to those who still work for the Government, but what about those who do not? Will the inquiry be able to summon witnesses and force them to give evidence? If the inquiry does not finally get to the bottom of what happened, the decisions that were made and the cover-up that may have happened afterwards, people will be very bitter.

Mr Lidington: I thank the hon. Lady for her support. She is right that there have been many allegations that there was not just an appalling degree of misjudgment
and mistreatment of people, but then a subsequent cover-up. One of the specific terms of reference involves asking the inquiry to consider whether such concealment took place, who would have been responsible for it, and its extent, so that is very much something that Sir Brian and his team will look into. One problem with appointing co-determining assessors would be that that would almost inevitably slow down the speed at which the inquiry could progress, because we would need to find experts—there would be a question as to how many were required to cover the field—who were prepared to take off a year or two years, full time, to serve alongside the chair. That was one of the reasons that weighed heavily in Sir Brian’s mind when he made his proposals on the terms of reference.

On powers to summon people, yes, the 2005 Act gives an inquiry of this kind the power to compel the attendance of individuals.

**Andrew Percy** (Brigg and Goole) (Con): In accepting Sir Brian’s view about the work of expert groups, can we be assured that those expert groups and panels will be fully transparent and that everything will be publicly available to those with an interest?

**Mr Lidington:** Yes. In his letter to me, Sir Brian proposed that there should be expert groups covering a number of areas and expertise, and that those would range from clinical expertise, with that group itself needing to involve experts in haematology, hepatology and virology, and separate expert groups dealing with medical ethics, statistics, and the psycho-social impact of the infected blood scandal, to experts on public administration. It is certainly Sir Brian’s intention that the deliberative sessions of those expert groups should be undertaken in public, and that the core participants in the inquiry should be able both to propose to the chair names for appointment to those expert groups and to ask questions of the experts during their deliberative sessions as well as during formal evidence given by the expert groups to the inquiry in plenary session. Clearly, given the way that these inquiries normally operate, our expectation is that that intervention on behalf of survivors and other core participants would be via their legal representatives, and that again reinforces the reasons why the Government have agreed, exceptionally, to offer legal aid.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I thank the Minister for making this oral statement today. The scale of the scandal is such that more than 2,500 people have already died as a result of this disaster. That is far more than all the other disasters from the 1970s added together, starting with the Moorgate tube disaster, running right through to Grenfell just last year—so more than all of those added up together. I want to pay tribute to all those who have fought, over many years, to get to this point. I am talking both about those who were infected and those who were affected. Madam Deputy Speaker, will you pass on my thanks to Mr Speaker for assisting Parliament in getting to this stage today by granting, I think, seven urgent questions, many debates, questions and statements in recent years, which has led to these terms of reference today? The terms of reference are comprehensive, covering many, if not all, of the points that those who were infected and those who are affected have raised with Sir Brian. The Minister made mention of two years as a possible timescale for this inquiry. Does he think that that is realistic considering that Penrose took far longer than that, and is there a mechanism by which Parliament can be given reports on a six-monthly basis of the progress that is being made?

**Mr Lidington:** I join the hon. Lady in the tributes that she has paid to the campaigners. The two-year period is an estimate. It is very difficult to be more precise than that because so much depends on where the evidence leads Sir Brian and the inquiry team. The fact that the expert panels that he has proposed will be able to carry out their work in parallel with the inquiry proper will make it easier to progress at speed than was the case under Penrose where the medical experts sat as a co-determining member of the inquiry alongside Penrose himself.

I should have said in answer to the hon. Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford), but I am happy to say to the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North that the inquiry will be able to offer interim reports. Although I cannot promise reports to the House at particular intervals, because, again, the inquiry is independent of Government direction, the possibility of interim reports is something that I have emphasised to Sir Brian and it lies within his powers.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): I welcome the statement from my right hon. Friend. May I also say how important it is for my constituents and the families of those who have been impacted by this that the inquiry is conducted in a speedy fashion, with answers and conclusions available as soon as possible? Can he confirm that the lessons learned from the experience of the Scottish inquiry will be fully taken on board by Sir Brian?

**Mr Lidington:** Yes, I can give that assurance. Indeed, when Sir Brian was consulting survivors’ groups and campaigners prior to sending me his proposed terms of reference, he took note from what was said by, among other groups, the Scottish Haemophilia Society and the Scottish Infected Blood Forum about what had gone wrong in respect of the Penrose model. Sir Brian is very keen to avoid those problems occurring in this new inquiry now.1

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Lab): On behalf of those families in Birkenhead who have been devastated by death and those who may face a similar fate, may I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his statement today? When the Prime Minister established the Hillsborough disaster inquiry, she broke the rules so that truth would emerge. She ruled, or got the whole Government to agree, that the onus was on Government to produce all the relevant papers and that the inquiry would not have to go fishing in the hope of finding those papers. Will he please give the same undertaking for this inquiry?

**Mr Lidington:** I will happily give the same undertaking. What is more, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is utterly determined—

Frank Field: Not only the Health Secretary’s Department but all the Departments involved.

Mr Lidington: My Cabinet colleagues are all very determined to get to the truth over this. It is important that the truth comes out both, and most importantly, to provide justice and transparency for the survivors and their families, and to ensure that any lessons about public administration can be learned and applied so that our constituents never have to go through such an experience again.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On behalf of my constituents who have been affected by this most horrendous situation, may I welcome the update that the Secretary of State has given? With regard to their ability to be able to propose experts and to put forward questions to expert groups, how will that opportunity be cascaded so that no one misses out?

Mr Lidington: It will be for the chair and his team to set out exactly how they plan to run the inquiry and how the expert groups, once appointed, will operate, but Sir Brian has demonstrated already his commitment to engage closely with survivors and campaign groups. I know that he will be very determined to ensure that nobody does inadvertently miss out on the opportunity to pose whatever questions they wish.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): On the question of additional panel members to sit alongside the chairman, the views of Sir Brian are obviously going to be very important and must be taken fully into account, but, ultimately, it will be the Minister’s decision, and it is a decision that will have a very profound impact on the job to be done. Expert advisers will give expert advice, but it will be the chairman and/or the panel members who ultimately make the recommendations. As the Minister decides whether or not to appoint extra panel members, can he assure me that the views of all those who have campaigned so long and so hard to get to this point will be taken into full account?

Mr Lidington: I can definitely give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. I shall be taking particular note when Sir Brian reports back to me in, I hope, a few weeks’ time of the views that have been expressed by campaigners and survivors’ groups in response to the proposals that he has tabled.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): A number of Members have commented on the importance of concluding this inquiry quickly, but will my right hon. Friend update us on the work that the chair of the inquiry has already done in preparing for the future stages?

Mr Lidington: Sir Brian has carried out a number of meetings with groups and with individuals across the country. He and his team have conducted a public consultation online, inviting letters, emails and telephone calls. He has demonstrated his commitment to take this matter forward rapidly and to do so taking very careful account of the views of survivors in particular. When I met Sir Brian, it was very clear to me that his involvement in the Bristol Royal Infirmary public inquiry of a few years ago had made a huge impression on him, and I know that he wants to apply the lessons that were learned in that inquiry to deliver the very best possible inquiry into the infected blood scandal.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Minister reassure me that in the overall inquiry survivors will be able to make their own representations independently of third sector groups such as the Haemophilia Society? That is not to detract from the organisation’s work in any way; it is simply that some individuals may not always have had a 100% positive relationship with such groups, and may want their representations to be considered completely separately from those of the society or other third sector groups.

Mr Lidington: In his letter proposing the terms of reference, Sir Brian Langstaff said to me that different groups had different views on how the inquiry should best be approached, and he will want to ensure that everybody gets their fair say. Obviously it is for the inquiry, not for Ministers, to determine who should be accepted as core participants.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that as well as direct legal expenses, related legal expenses in relation to responding to the consultation on the terms of reference will be met, so that the voice of victims and their families can be properly heard?

Mr Lidington: Yes, all reasonable expenses for legal representation to respond to the consultation on the terms of reference will be met, and any individual claims will be handled by the solicitor to the inquiry.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): When this issue is raised, I always thank my constituent Cathy Young, a leading member of the Scottish Infected Blood Forum who lost her husband to contaminated blood. I have had constituents who were involved in the Chilcot inquiry and waited years owing to Maxwellisation. This comes back to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford). Will the Minister ensure that someone who is asked to be held to account or who is at fault for any reason will not unnecessarily delay the outcome of this inquiry due to Maxwellisation?

Mr Lidington: It is in no one’s interests that this inquiry is delayed unnecessarily. It should take only as long as is required to establish the truth and come to appropriate conclusions. I believe that Sir Brian has the powers he needs to take forward an inquiry that is both thorough and speedy, and I very much trust him and his team to do that. He, as much as anybody else, is conscious of the agony that survivors and their families have already had to endure. He will not want the inquiry to last one day longer than is essential.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): The Farrugia family in my Aberavon constituency have been treated in an absolutely appalling manner throughout this entire sorry affair, so they will certainly welcome today’s announcement. Will the Minister provide a bit more assurance about the access to the updates—regular and detailed ones, I hope—that my constituents will receive as this process begins and goes on?
Mr Lidington: The question of whether there will be formal interim reports is a matter for the inquiry chair under the terms of the 2005 Act, but I can assure the Farrugia family, through the hon. Gentleman, that all proceedings of the inquiry and the expert groups will be public. I am sure that Sir Brian will want to ensure that the records of those proceedings are made widely available to all who are particularly affected.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his thorough replies to all Members. May I ask him, on behalf of my constituents—and indeed, on behalf of all those across Northern Ireland, as a Member of Parliament for Northern Ireland—what plans the Government have to improve the financial support for people infected by contaminated blood and blood products, and their families? Also, what discussions has he had with the Northern Ireland Department of Health in the absence of a non-functioning Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mr Lidington: Clearly it is for the health service in Northern Ireland to improve procedures, as the health service has sought to do throughout the United Kingdom in the light of what is already known about the contaminated blood scandal. One of the advantages of having the proceedings of the inquiry in public—including those of expert panels—and having the possibility of interim reports is that it would enable the health service in Northern Ireland and elsewhere to make whatever additional changes might be needed in the light of the inquiry’s emerging findings.

Estimates Day

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

[Relevant Documents: Oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 26 June 2018, on Prison Population 2022: planning for the future, HC 483; oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 22 May and 12 June 2018, on Criminal legal aid, HC 1069; and oral evidence taken before the Justice Committee on 7 March 2018, on The work of the Ministry of Justice, HC 418.]

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Ministry of Justice:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £3,673,299,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017-19,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £198,182,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £3,635,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—[Paul Maynard.]

Robert Neill (Bromley and Chislehurst) (Con): It is a pleasure to start this debate. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for having facilitated it, my colleagues on the Select Committee on Justice for the work that they have done on the estimates and, more broadly, the work of the Ministry of Justice during this Parliament so far and beyond.

This is an important debate because although the Ministry of Justice is one of the smaller Departments in budgetary terms, its work is fundamental to the nature of a civilised society. Ultimately, justice is not a transaction; it is something that underpins the way in which we live our lives and the way in which we treat each another in a civilised society. Perhaps it should be measured more by its impact than purely in monetary terms. It has to be said that in that regard, frankly, we get our justice system pretty cheaply. Overall the Ministry of Justice is about 12th in terms of spending Departments. Its total expenditure, on the current form, is a resource departmental expenditure limit—a resource budget, in effect—of £6.9 billion. To put that in context, it is less than 2% of total Government resource DEL and about 1% of total public spending across the UK, which amounts to some £800 billion. We are talking about a small amount of money.

The problems that the Ministry faces are twofold. Within that amount of money, the Ministry has to deal with key issues. Some 50% of its budget goes on prisons and probation, some 20% goes on the courts services and related matters such as legal aid, access to justice and so on, and the rest is spent on a number of key agencies. The two biggest issues—prisons and probation, and courts and legal aid—are very much demand-led. At the same time as being a Department most of whose work and services are demand-led, the Ministry also has to cope with the difficulty of being an unprotected Department in terms of our necessary approach to reducing the deficit and public debt. That places particular pressures on those who work in the
Department and its agencies. I will be frank; as a former Minister, I know that it also places particular pressures on the Ministers, to whom I pay tribute. Over the years, many of them have worked very hard to tackle the problems of the Department, to the point where they work really hard to deal with a difficult situation, but Parliament needs to take a look at whether we give adequate resources to the task required of them.

It has been very clear that the resources have been reduced considerably—and more than many other Departments—because of the Ministry’s unprotected nature. The upshot has been that the resource DEL for 2016-17 is 29% lower in real terms than it was in 2010-11. The prison population has not declined since 2010-11. In fact, it spiked up initially and then stabilised only over the past couple of years. That is a significant cost pressure that has gone on. Because we do not seek, naturally, to inhibit the sentencing decisions of individual judges in individual cases, there is limited control over what can be done.

In addition, for reasons that we will perhaps touch on, there are costs to the public purse that go beyond some of the failures in our prison system. We imprison a higher number of people than many of our comparators, and unfortunately we have worse rates of reoffending. As the Department and the Government accept, reoffending has an economic cost to the United Kingdom of some £15 billion a year. So not only is there a squeeze on the attempts—the genuine attempts—that are being made to reduce reoffending, to rehabilitate and reform, but we are not getting the outcomes that we need from that. Equally, the failure to achieve all those outcomes creates a further cost pressure at the other end of the scale as well. That is why the reforms that the Government and Ministers are seeking to make are all the more important.

Moreover—other members of the Select Committee will touch on this in more detail—there are real pressures and difficulties within different parts of the prison system. Over the years that we have been a Select Committee, both in this Parliament and its rather short predecessor, we have delivered a number of reports on matters such as prison safety, the way in which we treat younger adults in the prison system—where there are real and specific difficulties—the recruitment and retention of prison staff, and morale within prisons. These issues are all interlinked.

Because the number of prisoners remains stubbornly high and because the resource available has declined, there has been a concerning deterioration in a number of key areas. Prison safety is an obvious example. Her Majesty’s chief inspector of prisons, whose work we should all pay tribute to, has produced a number of reports that show, regrettably—despite a number of initiatives by Ministers to seek interventions to remedy the position—a considerable increase, over a period, in assaults, both inmate-on-inmate assaults and assaults on members of staff. There has been a 44% increase in prisoner assault incidents since 2015. The rate of assaults, which is perhaps the most telling figure, has increased from 190 per 1,000 in 2007 to 344 per 1,000 in 2017. Assaults on prison staff have increased from 43 per 1,000 in 2007 to 98 per 1,000 in 2017.

That has an impact on staff morale and staff retention. It also means—because of the need, naturally, to keep the prison regime safe—that only a very small percentage of prisoners are being unlocked for the 10 hours that is the expectation of Her Majesty’s chief inspectorate. That is a problem because restricted regimes make it much harder to carry out the reform and rehabilitation work that Ministers—and, I believe, every one of us in this House—want to see. Further budgetary pressures that currently seem to be the case for the Department can only make that harder without some radical change.

We have to bear in mind not only that there are past budgetary pressures, but that the Ministry needs to reduce its annual spending by £500 million from 2015-16 levels to 2019-20 to meet the 2015 spending round.

That, in my judgment and that of many others, can be done in only two ways. Either we change those spending levels and put more money into prisons, at great expense to the taxpayer, or we—as a society and as a Parliament—seize the bull by the horns and make a determined resolve to reduce the prison population. That can be done, in particular, by releasing prisoners who are not a threat to society in a physical or serious financial sense and by finding robust and credible alternatives to custody that enable sentencers to deal with many more offenders in the community without the need for the extreme cost of imprisonment—some £23,000, on average, but much more for certain classes of offender, particularly young offenders. Unless we want to have a permanent bottomless pit, we have to make investment to make savings in the long term, not only in economic terms but in social and human terms.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I am concerned about cuts to legal aid, because I have constituents who have done nothing and need legal aid to fight their case in the courts. Will the hon. Gentleman say a little more about that, particularly with regard to the situation of women?

Robert Neill: I am trying to give an overview, so I will come on to legal aid and access to justice issues. I will deal with the prisons and probation part of the budget first, because it is the largest element and therefore the elephant in the room in financial terms.

There have been efforts to deal with this. The Ministry succeeded in getting the funding for 2,500 extra prison officers. That is admirable. It is worth noting that extra equipment has been provided by way of body-worn cameras. Real and valuable initiatives have been proposed such as the employment and education strategy and the female offender strategy. Those are all welcome, but what we really need to do is grasp the nettle and have a joined-up approach to looking again at our assumption about imprisoning people to a greater degree than most of our comparators. That decision has to be made now.

I turn to an issue that our Committee has touched on already in our inquiry into transforming rehabilitation—the costs of reforming the National Probation Service. What concerns us, from a budgetary point of view, is that the split between the National Probation Service and community rehabilitation companies was clearly not fully costed. Instead of making the savings that had been intended, some £400 million more has had to be put in to shore up those companies and those contracts. We do not regard that as sustainable. We need a clear plan from the Government on how this will be rectified.

We have published a report to that effect. I welcome the Minister’s robust approach in saying that nothing is off the table, including removing contracts from failing providers if necessary. It is important that that is tackled urgently.
Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): My hon. Friend makes a valuable point. While there are challenges in the new system of probation supervision, does he agree that it is very welcome that we are now supervising short-term prisoners, which for many years we did not do?

Robert Neill: That is an admirable objective, but I regret to say that the evidence of our inquiry is that it seldom happens adequately in practice. One of the findings, which is for another debate, is that in many cases the level of supervision has in fact declined. Sometimes, it happens purely by phone calls once every six weeks, and in many cases the involvement of the voluntary sector and other local agencies has declined. The objective was absolutely laudable, but I fear that there are serious question marks about how it is being delivered in practice. It is very patchy across the country, to be frank.

I turn to matters to do with the Courts and Tribunals Service. The question of legal aid is a vexed one. We have reported on that, too. There have been reductions to legal aid. I understand the pressures that the Department was under, and the whole Government were under, when the coalition came in in 2010 and the consequent need reduce public indebtedness, with everything having to bear a share of that. My personal conclusion is that we went too far in those matters and that we now have a situation where cuts to legal aid are becoming counterproductive. For example, there have been attempts to raise extra—

Mr Jim Cunningham rose—

Robert Neill: I really cannot give way again because time presses, and I know that others will touch on this issue.

There have already been concerns about certain cost-raising measures. Increasing fees and reducing eligibility were found to be unlawful by the courts, so those measures have had to be revisited. Withdrawal of legal aid in some areas has created a significant increase in litigants in person. Litigants in person are an undesirable feature, for a number of reasons. The obvious one is it damages the reputation of the justice system, but also, in practical and budgetary terms, cases involving litigants in person take longer to hear. There is much greater likelihood that, without early legal advice, litigants will pursue unmeritorious claims that have to be litigated in court rather than siphoned off with robust advice from lawyers.

In family court cases, rather than seeing an increase in mediation, as was anticipated, mediation has fallen through the floor. That sharp decline, all the evidence now shows, is because it is early advice from experienced family lawyers that signposts mediation to people. I believe there is a very strong case that reinvestment in early legal advice through legal aid would save money and save social damage.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Robert Neill: I will, but this really must be the last time.

Bim Afolami: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. On mediation, does he agree that what might be needed from the Government is more publicising of that method of dispute resolution, because a significant number of people do not know that it exists?

Robert Neill: That is an entirely fair point, and I welcome it. There needs to be more publicity generally for public legal education, and mediation is an important part of that, but even then, it is important to realise that many people—particularly those going through a family breakdown—will not feel able or confident to go to that on their own initiative without some assistance. Early legal advice will get them into the mediation process, rather than drawn-out litigation in front of a family court judge. That will be a cost saving.

The other point is that this is one of many burdens that are affecting judicial morale. In the statement earlier today, the value of our judiciary was highlighted by the appointment of a High Court judge, Sir Brian Langstaff, as is often the case, to head an inquiry into important and grave matters of public concern. We do that because of the high reputation of the integrity and quality of our judiciary, but there are now real concerns from the senior judiciary about how we sustain that. Recruitment to the High Court bench and now to the circuit bench is struggling. That used not to be the case.

There is a raft of reasons. First, it is partly a question of pay. The truth is that we are often asking people to give up highly lucrative practices to undertake public service. The second is the pensions regime, and the third is the working conditions. Part of that is due to the growth in pressure that litigants in person brings, particularly at the district judge and circuit judge level. There is also the additional administrative work that is forced upon us, and the lack of investment on the capital front in the court estate means that the working conditions are not those that one would expect of senior professional people. That is an argument for looking again at the capital budget.

There are a number of other matters that one could readily touch upon, but time does not permit it. I know and respect the Ministers in the Department. I know that they seek genuinely to reform and to find a cost-effective justice system that delivers, but they need the help of the House and far greater public awareness of the pressures upon the system, they need to be radical with the resources that we have and they need to be prepared to invest for the future. Ultimately, justice is not a transaction; justice is central. The more that is said in such debates and elsewhere, the better, and this debate is an opportunity to say precisely that.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. There is some pressure on time this evening, but I would prefer not to impose a time limit. If Members could stick to eight minutes, that would be very helpful.

6.43 pm

Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): It is a pleasure to take part in the debate and to follow the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), the Chair of the Justice Committee; I will touch briefly on the Committee’s “Transforming Rehabilitation” report. I also welcome the relatively new Ministers—one of them is very new—to their places.

I want to begin with a positive, which is the construction in my constituency of the largest prison in western Europe, HM Prison Berwyn—a proposal the size of which concerned me deeply, to such an extent that I
initially opposed the construction of the prison. However, I have worked very closely with the Ministry of Justice over a considerable period and have benefited from that. I would particularly like to thank Amy Rees, the current leader of the Prison and Probation Service in Wales, and the governor, Russ Trent, with whom I met on Friday and with whom I have developed a close working relationship.

I never had a prison in my constituency until this prison was opened, so this is new to me and there are real challenges relating to it. However, I say cautiously that I think the prison has been welcomed in Wrexham, and positive work is taking place there, which we all want to support. Wrexham’s community has been working hard with the local prison, and the prison has been very good at engaging with business and local voluntary organisations. At this stage, the prison is around half full—perhaps a little more—and the close relations between the community, me as the Member of Parliament and the prison have been very positive. I would like to thank those working at the prison for their engagement.

On probation, I was interested to read the “Transforming Rehabilitation” report to which the Chair of the Select Committee referred. I will not rehearse what I said last week, but there has been an extremely serious case in Wrexham involving the murder of one of my constituents, Mr Nicholas Churton, which appears to have been the result of a failure to adequately supervise an individual who was under supervision and on licence from prison. That is currently the subject of two Independent Office for Police Conduct investigations. I have spoken in detail with the probation service about it but unfortunately have not had the same level of co-operation from North Wales police. That causes me profound concern about the current probation regime. The incident that led to the murder of my constituent happened well over a year ago. We are still awaiting the outcomes of the inquiries, and I will watch those extremely closely. I have profound concerns about the resourcing of the current system. I hope that when the reports come back to the Ministers, they will look at them extremely closely and ensure that there is no repeat of the appalling failures that appear to have happened.

The third area that I want to raise is the court system. In a previous life, I was a solicitor, and for a time I worked as a practising solicitor in the criminal courts. That was so long ago that if there was an issue at Wrexham magistrates court until I raised the issue some years ago. That began a sequence of correspondence with the Ministry of Justice and with Ministers concerning the magistrates court and led me to secure in 2016 what I believed was an undertaking from the then Minister that criminal cases would continue to be heard in Wrexham—the largest town in north Wales—and that custody facilities would be developed and built to serve the court. I was therefore very upset last week to receive a notice that I believe was sent to magistrates in Wrexham, saying:

“As you are aware, the closure of Wrexham Police station has led to the loss of the shared custodial facilities at Wrexham Magistrates Court. As such, from Friday 17 August, cases that have a custodial requirement will be listed at Mold.”

That is exactly what I have been working for a number of years to avoid. My objective has been to ensure that there continues to be a fully functioning and effective working magistrates court in the largest town in north Wales.

The decision that appears to have been made thus far by the Ministry of Justice or its officials in the local area is that the court will cease in August. We do not know at this juncture—there has been no discussion with anyone that I am aware of, and certainly not with me—that the proposals are for the magistrates court in Wrexham. The local administration of the magistrates court knows very well that I have been following this extremely closely, and that I have intervened a number of times to obtain information about the case. At no stage, however, has there been any attempt to contact me concerning the present circumstances at the court.

It seems to me that this is a microcosm of how the court system is now operating certainly in Wales and, I am sure, across England too. The remoteness of the court system and the administration from Members of Parliament and from their local communities is the absolute antithesis of what a local system of justice should be. I, as the Member of Parliament, have no idea what the correct point of contact is. I would therefore welcome a complete rethink by Ministers on the Front Bench as far as the courts are concerned, and I would welcome a re-engagement with elected Members of Parliament about the future of their local magistrates courts and the local justice system.

Local justice is hugely important, and towns need the thriving local businesses—for example, solicitors’ offices—that serve the magistrates court in civic centres such as Wrexham. The way in which the Government and the Ministry of Justice are operating at the moment is that they have scant regard for those towns, for the Members of Parliament and for the people that I represent. That needs to change fundamentally, and I would really welcome such a change from the Ministers who have been listening to me so courteously.
Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am afraid that I will now have to put on an eight-minute time limit.

6.53 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): It is pleasing to be able to contribute to this estimates day debate. It gives me the opportunity to cover some general issues concerning the criminal justice system, and also a couple of specific ones. I think we would all agree that it is of course the first obligation on any Government to protect their people. We often hear that said in a defence context, but it is just as pertinent in a civilian one. We have to recognise that crime has the ability to undermine the very fabric of our society.

I was pleased to hear just that point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill), who is a very competent Chairman of the Justice Committee. I was a member of the Committee under his predecessor, Lord Beith, who was also a very competent Chairman. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the importance for the whole of society of having a strong justice system. He is also very correct to point out where there are failings in the system. I do not always agree with him on the points that he and his Committee makes, but it is incumbent on the Chairman of a Select Committee to make such points well known.

My hon. Friend raised the issue of the supervision of short-term offenders, and it is very correct that he should point out failings where there is a lack of resource and where we can improve that supervision. Ever since probation officers started to supervise offenders, failings have always taken place. I would not argue against that perhaps still being the case today, and there are some improvements that can be made. Where I would depart from him, however, is that I very much welcome the fact that short-term offenders or prisoners are getting some assistance. That assistance may well need improvement, but it is right to have introduced a system to end the frustration of seeing people leave prison after a few weeks—they are given a small amount of money and sent on their way—and somehow being surprised when those individuals come back into the penal system again. It is a huge step in the right direction that we are now supervising those individuals. Even if that supervision needs improvement, it is welcome that we are supervising those individuals for the first time in many years—perhaps for the first time ever.

Generally speaking, I believe that the issue of law and order is not perhaps given the prominence it should have. We all want good schools, hospitals and public services, and we want a good strong economy, but if we allow crime to take over a particular area, we undermine the very fabric of society and everything else that we are trying to achieve. It is good to have an opportunity to have this debate on the criminal justice system to highlight just how important the system is for the very bedrock of our society.

Robert Neill: Like me, my hon. Friend has a long background in the criminal justice system as a practitioner. Does he share my concern that there has been a marked decline in the availability of duty solicitors and other legal aid solicitors to attend police stations and courts, and that the average age of a duty solicitor is now about 47 plus?

Gareth Johnson: As a 48-year-old, I instinctively have sympathy with the point my hon. Friend makes. While the prosecution must be represented, it is absolutely essential that the defence has representation as well. That is in the interests of justice.

It is fair to say that this country, compared with the rest of the world, spends a favourable amount of money on legal aid. I concede that it is always difficult to compare the justice system with others internationally—it is not always an easy comparison to make—but if we look at the overall amount that this country puts into legal aid, we can be reasonably proud of it. However, I concede that there are huge frustrations among some of my former colleagues in the criminal justice system about being unable to represent their clients and pursue matters in the interests of justice in the way they were perhaps once able to do.

My hon. Friend is quite right that I spent some 20 years in the criminal justice system as a duty solicitor. I do not have the experience of the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) of going into the cells in his area. However, I had the experience of trying to administer justice on the frontline, which is undoubtedly what happens for duty solicitors and solicitors who work in the criminal justice system. What I learned during that time is that crime is a very complicated thing. I do not believe that there is a simple solution to any of the problems we face with crime in this country. We cannot tackle it from one single angle; it needs a multifaceted approach.

I believe very strongly that criminals tend to have one thing in common, which is a selfish failure to take responsibility for their own actions, but the reasons behind that are often very complex. This sticks in my throat a bit, but to be fair, Tony Blair was actually going in the right direction when he said, “Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime”. Whether or not he took that approach is open for debate, but it is the one we need. We need to take a holistic approach to tackling crime. We cannot deal with it simply by locking up more and more people. Equally, we cannot deal with it by trying to coddle people and to help them on their way. As I say, this needs a multifaceted approach.

It is good that on this estimates day we are concentrating on how we can ensure that society is protected, and that we do not end up trying to regain lost causes because the system has failed, which is much harder to do. Part of that is about ensuring that criminals receive the right sentences for the offences they commit, which is why I advocate expanding the scope of the unduly lenient sentence scheme. We have already taken some steps in that regard. It is right that the defence should be able to appeal against sentences that are too harsh, but in my opinion it is wrong that in so many instances the prosecution cannot appeal against sentences that are unduly lenient. For malicious wounding, actual bodily harm, child cruelty, distribution of child abuse photos, burglary and even rape, when dealt with in the youth court, the prosecution cannot appeal against the sentence handed down, however unduly lenient, because those crimes are not covered by the current scheme. That needs to change.
We all agree that the punishment should fit the crime. When it does not, there should be a mechanism in place to allow appeals.

We also need the Government to be flexible in their approach to law and order issues. Government attitudes have to change in accordance with society’s attitudes. I welcomed the announcement that it will now be possible to impose a life sentence for death by dangerous driving, because too often we have seen the courts impose inadequate sentences for some of these incredibly serious crimes. I would also like to see the Crown Prosecution Service making more use of manslaughter charges in the most serious cases.

A lot of work needs to be done in this area. I congratulate the Government on some of the things they are doing to ensure that law and order are at the top of the agenda. I think that we should give this area greater priority. If we do not get our approach to law and order right, we undermine the whole fabric of our society.

7.2 pm

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): I thank the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to the debate and the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) for introducing it. The debate is about the Ministry of Justice’s estimates. In practice, that means that it is about how we protect the public; how we turn around the lives of offenders by rehabilitating them so that they can go back into society; how we have a proper through-the-gate system to ensure that people leave prison in a better state than when they went in; and, in particular, how we reduce reoffending by ensuring positive inputs in prison.

The challenge for the Minister today—I will be particularly interested to hear his contribution—is to explain how he will do all that against the backdrop of the challenges we have faced over the past eight or nine years, and the funding regime over the next three or four years of the current cycle. He will know, although it is still important to remind him, that there are some serious funding challenges. We have seen a 40% decrease in funding for prisons and probation, which are the areas I will focus on today. The annual budget will have fallen from £9.3 billion in current prices in 2010-11 to £5.6 billion by 2019-20, and we are facing potential cuts of £800 million from April 2017 to April 2020. The funding challenge is important because, as the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst explained, prisoner numbers have not fallen. If anything, the seriousness of offences has increased, the age and infirmity of prisoners have risen and the number of prisoners reoffending in under 12 months has risen. The level of violent crime in our prisons today is a serious challenge.

The Minister’s first challenge today is therefore to explain to the House how he will achieve what I know he believes to be laudable objectives over the next few years, despite the massive reduction in funding to date and in the future. He needs to explain how he will manage the challenges resulting from his Government’s decision to outsource some of the services that he wants to improve as part of his back to basics campaign on prison conditions.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I share the right hon. Gentleman’s desire to get prisoners back into work. Does he agree that the changes that can be made to achieve that are actually quite small? The previous Justice Committee saw during a visit to Denmark how communal cooking by prisoners of food that they had bought was a very good marker for getting them to move on in life after prison.

David Hanson: There are a number of things that we can do, and I know that the Minister is interested in how we can make the things that happen in prison relevant to the things that happen outside prison, so that skills, training and communal activities prepare prisoners for life outside in a positive way.

The Minister needs to focus on the consequences for probation, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas), because every indicator over the past seven years has proved difficult for the Government. The Minister needs to explain how he will turn that around, given the current estimates. Let me give just three examples. There are still 7,000 fewer prison officers today than there were eight years ago. The Government are now trying to increase the number of prison officers as a whole, but however many they increase it by, there will still be fewer officers to deal with the same number of prisoners we had eight years ago. The number of assaults on prisoners increased last year by 11%—to over 29,000. At more than 80 per day, that is the highest number of assaults since records began. The number of serious assaults on prisoners increased by 10%, which is the highest level since records began, and the number of assaults on staff increased by 23% over the past year. The number of serious assaults on staff reached 864 in 2017, which is the highest number since records began.

Those indicators are in part the result of underfunding, so it is important that the Minister explains how he will turn the prison system around, particularly with regard to prison numbers, prison officer engagement, training and employment schemes, and meeting his aspirations of having a cohort of six prisoners per officer. The budget is already down by 40%, and it will decrease still further over the next few years. The rate of self-harm—there were 44,651 incidents in 2017—is now at its highest since records began.

What is the Minister going to do to turn that situation around at a time of less resources? Eight prisons are currently in special measures. Within those cohorts—given the time available, I will not expand in great detail—we face some real challenges. He talked last week about the potential expense of Carillion’s collapse for the Ministry of Justice. We have heard about his back to basics campaign, in which he wants to increase investment and focus on the condition of cells and maintenance, but I would like to know how he will do that within the terms of the estimates.

A little over a week ago, the Justice Committee, ably chaired by the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, published its “Transforming Rehabilitation” report. It is particularly important that in this estimates debate the Minister touches on what he will do about probation through-the-gate provision, community rehabilitation companies and transforming rehabilitation. I could spend the next hour reading the recommendations of “Transforming Rehabilitation”, which points to massive failures of contract management, massive subsidies of public money for no definitive outcomes, and massive
mistakes by Minister in managing contracts. The question prompted by the estimates is: what is the Minister going to do about that?

When the Minister was questioned by the Committee last week, he teased us by saying he might reduce the number of community rehabilitation companies in the next few months and would make an announcement before the end of July. Press speculation last week said the reduction would be from 21 to 14. Current contracts for community rehabilitation companies last until 2022, and the Minister teased us with the possibility of the end of those contracts in 2020.

It does not take a genius to know that the contracts are not performing well. The Minister’s Department bunged the companies more than £400 million last August to shore them up because of failures of the contract mechanism. This is an estimates debate, so the Minister needs to explain to the House what he sees as the future of community rehabilitation companies, how he sees the funding mechanisms, whether those funding mechanisms impact on the estimates before us, and how the companies will operate in the period up to the next comprehensive spending review. He needs to set out to the Committee what he will say to the Treasury about the estimates that he and his own chief financial officer admitted last week are difficult, but are not yet cemented down for the comprehensive spending review from 2018 to 2022.

This matters because it is, as the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) indicated, about public safety. It is about preventing crime, rehabilitating offenders, reducing offending and making our society safer. This is not so much an estimates debate as a “how are we going to do it?” debate. How are we going to make the improvements the Prison Service needs? How are we going to make the necessary comprehensive improvements to CRCS? The Minister has a duty to the House to set that out now in this debate.

7.11 pm

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson).

Justice could not be more important and it is fundamental to what it means to be British. Why do I say that? One only has to look at Department for Education guidance on the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect of and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs. If we look further at the understanding the Department wants to promote and the values it wants to engender in young people, it states:

“An appreciation that living under the rule of law protects individual citizens and is essential for their wellbeing and safety”. In other words, the rule of law is not just some arcane phrase beloved of lawyers; it is about concrete rights that ordinary human beings and citizens in our country are entitled to enforce.

The rule of law and the principles we hold dear represent one of our most precious exports: the common law system. Yet surely there has never been a greater gap between the importance of an issue and its political profile — not under this Government or any other Government specifically, but as a general position. Issues of the law do not tend to move the dial politically in the same way as the NHS or education. That is a really important point, because it is incumbent on us in this place to make those arguments. The truth is that respect for justice is culturally ingrained through such things as the strength of our jury system. There is a collective common sense among the British people that rails against injustice wherever they see it, whether it is in the cases of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four or, more recently, Liam Allan. The British people are appalled when they see injustice, yet there is a disconnect because it does not seem to enjoy the political profile that it should.

As this is an estimates debate, it is important that we consider funding. Governments must live within their means—that is absolutely right—but it is important to observe the total allocated for this budget, which we all recognise as so vital. The total annual managed expenditure of £7.36 billion for 2018-19 will be reduced in 2019-20 to £6.89 billion. To put that into context, the Treasury Red Book states total UK Government expenditure for the first of those two years as £809 billion. By my calculations, £7.36 billion out of £809 billion is less than 1%. The Department for Work and Pensions spends the equivalent of the entire Ministry of Justice budget in about 10 days. The total Department for International Development budget is about double the MOJ budget. The amount spent on aid to Syria alone—one country—of £2.3 billion is more than the entire legal aid budget. Those are sobering figures. I do not for a second doubt the Government’s sincerity when they say they want to prioritise the rule of law and access to justice, but that is none the less a startling suite of statistics. It is important that although this area does not necessarily have support within the media, it has its champions here in Parliament.

Bim Afolami: I just want to take issue with my hon. Friend slightly on the political saliency of some of these matters. I think all Members know that prisons, prison reform, rehabilitation and legal aid do carry weight with the public. What would he say to those who suggest that this area does have political significance, and that we need to make sure that Conservative Members are making the arguments for the reforms that we want?

Alex Chalk: The point is that it has significance when it goes wrong. People will assume that our justice system and our prisons are working absolutely fine, but if there are occasions when that is shown to be wrong, people have a sense of utter outrage. I do not think it is too grandiose to say that we have an instinctive respect for justice in this country. It is considered to be a British value, and people want to see that value in practice.

I want to make a few simple points. Without proper legal aid, rights become meaningless and the laws that frame them become redundant. We might metaphorically slap ourselves on the back and say we have done a wonderful job when we enact legislation, but unless rights can be upheld, they become redundant. As the Supreme Court put it:

“laws are liable to become a dead letter, the work done by Parliament may be rendered nugatory, and the democratic election of Members of Parliament may become a meaningless charade.”

That is why it is vital that we ensure there is sufficient legal aid so that individuals are able to prosecute their rights.
When this Government came to office in 2010, it was entirely appropriate for them to have a look at the Ministry of Justice’s funding. It is also the case, however, that we must do what we can to ensure that access to justice is truly maintained. I know that a review into the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 is taking place. That review will be led by evidence, and I have every confidence that the Government will look at the matter with the seriousness it deserves, but it is important that by the end of the process we ensure that individuals are able to access justice and defend their rights. To be clear, this is not about esoteric high-falutin’ rights. This is about ensuring that individuals who have been wronged are able to get redress in the courts because, heaven forbid—I am not suggesting that this will come to pass for a moment—if people start to lose faith in their ability to seek redress in the courts, we can be absolutely sure what will happen: they will take their dispute outside the courts and that is the last thing we want.

I commend the Government for taking an extremely enlightened approach and ensuring there will be additional funding for criminal legal aid. That is important because it is such a precious resource to maintain. I declare an interest, for obvious reasons, but if ever there was a system that was properly set up to incentivise people to work hard, the Bar is it. People realise that if they want to get that next brief, they have to work to the nth degree to ensure that they are doing the best possible job, whether they are instructed by the CPS or defence solicitors.

Robert Neill: Does my hon. Friend agree about the importance of the objectivity that properly experienced counsel on both sides bring to these matters, as has been seen demonstrated in a number of recent cases? That cannot be got on the cheap—and I must declare my interest as well.

Alex Chalk: Of course that is absolutely right. People who serve on a jury want to be satisfied that there is proper equality of arms. Again, that is not a high-falutin’ principle. They want to ensure that there is a proper prosecutor and proper defence counsel, because juries have an excellent way of providing justice if they think that others will not. What do I mean by that? Anecdotally, prosecuting counsel will say that the worst thing that can happen to them is to find that the defence counsel is simply ill-prepared or has been inadequately resourced, because juries may then seek to acquit defendants who ought otherwise to be convicted because they perceive that that individual has not had a proper defence.

The right hon. Member for Delyn made some pointed remarks about the conditions in our prisons. He was absolutely right to do so, but we have to recognise that keeping people in custody is an immensely expensive business. We want to ensure that we can do all the things that are important—ensure that there is access to justice and that people can properly safeguard their rights—but we have to recognise that if there is a shrinking budget and a similar number of people in custody, there is every risk that what gets squeezed is the remaining parts of the budget, which covers issues such as legal aid.

The UK—I refer to that country specifically, rather than England and Wales—incarcerates in the order of 95,000 people. In Germany, the figure is a little over 60,000, as is the case in France. In other words, compared with other countries, apart from Russia and a small number of others, the United Kingdom incarcerates a higher proportion of people, so we should do away with the argument that is sometimes peddled in certain newspapers that we are somehow soft on crime. Nothing could be further than the truth. We incarcerate a high proportion of our citizens, relatively speaking.

We have to deal with some hard truths in this estimates debate, and one of those is how many people this country can afford to put in prison. It is all very well for politicians on both sides of the House to talk tough, but we have to recognise that a cost comes with that. If that cost is too high, it will crowd out something that is intensely precious to who we are as a country: the rule of law, access to justice and the freedom of individuals. Those are principles worth preserving.

7.22 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and particularly to follow the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who said a great deal with which I agree. As we have heard, the cuts that the Ministry of Justice has suffered over the last eight years have been particularly harsh and have led to a crisis of safety in some of our prisons, and, given the scathing report that the Justice Committee produced last week on the transforming rehabilitation programme, there is much to be very concerned about.

However, I want to welcome the announcement last week of the female offender strategy, with its focus on the complex factors that act as a backdrop to female offending. I particularly welcome the decision not to build new women’s prisons. Many of us, including campaigners and others in this House and in the other place, repeatedly pleaded with Ministers not to do that, and it is really encouraging that they have taken the decision to concentrate on community solutions, which have been shown to be more effective in reducing reoffending and do less damage to women, families and communities.

The whole-system approach that Ministers wish to take offers a real opportunity to see women not through the lens of “offenders”, but as women who have a complex range of social and economic needs that require multi-faceted solutions. If the strategy is to be effective, it is absolutely vital that they are seen in that way, because key to the whole-system approach’s success is bringing on board all the agencies, not just from the criminal justice system but from local government, health, education, employment and so on. If we look at women through that lens—that they have a complex range of needs that need to be met by a range of agencies—we will have a more effective strategy.

I have to say, having welcomed the strategy, which I do, that the funding for the women’s centres seems on the low side, especially compared with the savings that the Department will now make by not building the new prisons. Sadly, those savings appear to be flowing right back into the Treasury for the most part, which is a real missed opportunity for justice reinvestment. Although I welcome the fact that the settlement will benefit new provision in the women’s centres, it is very important that Ministers place on a sustainable basis, now and in the future, funding for all women’s centres—existing and new, and those with residential accommodation and those without it. Up to now, we have seen a patchwork of
charitable, local and some community rehabilitation company funding. We really need a funding model to ensure that the women's centre model is secure and stable if it is to succeed, as it can, into the future.

We have heard quite a lot about the transforming rehabilitation programme this evening. I was particularly interested that the Justice Committee declined in its report to say very much about women's experience of transforming rehabilitation, pending the publication of the female offender strategy. I can say, however, from what I have heard from my women's centre in Manchester, that funding women's centres through the CRCs is unlikely to be a very effective way of spending money. It will not foster good practice because we can see already that the CRCs are struggling to offer very well designed and specialist programmes for women.

Indeed, the evidence that I have seen so far suggests that transforming rehabilitation has not been very effective for women offenders. A lack of specialist programmes means that if one programme does not work, there is no alternative to try that has been particularly designed for women. There is often an emphasis on group work, which, while it has its place, is not suitable for all women in all circumstances. Not all CRCs are willing to work with or commission provision from their local women's centres, and as we also know, the certainty about the future contracts held by the CRCs is now in question. The Minister has indicated that he will review those contracts early, so it is not even clear that all these CRCs will allow a great fan—it is probably the only aspect of transforming rehabilitation of which I was a great fan—but which I have to say, for offenders being released after short custodial sentences, has really not worked out in practice. The incidence of breaches and recalls has been much higher than we expected. That is putting more pressure on the prison system. Women again face particular challenges with a model that makes it more likely that they will not comply and face breach proceedings—for example, childcare may break down or they may be coerced into not attending an appointment. That means that we are seeing a higher incidence of women being returned to custody because of a breach. Will the Minister look carefully at what opportunities there may be to revisit this model? I therefore urge Ministers to look carefully at putting this new funding directly into women's centres and not through the medium of the CRCs, because I think that will prove more effective.

The hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) raised the issue of post-release supervision, of which I was originally a great fan—it is probably the only aspect of transforming rehabilitation of which I was a great fan—but which I have to say, for offenders being released after short custodial sentences, has really not worked out in practice. The incidence of breaches and recalls has been much higher than we expected. That is putting more pressure on the prison system. Women again face particular challenges with a model that makes it more likely that they will not comply and face breach proceedings—for example, childcare may break down or they may be coerced into not attending an appointment. That means that we are seeing a higher incidence of women being returned to custody because of a breach. Will the Minister look carefully at what opportunities there may be to revisit this model? I do not think that anybody's intention could have been that more supervision post-release would result in more women being returned more often to prison. That cannot have been the intention.

In support of what other colleagues have said, I think there is much more work to be done on the through-the-gate model. Indeed, it is often non-existent at present. The Minister suggested in his evidence to the Justice Committee that through-the-gate had never been seen as being anything more than some signposting of other services in the community. I do not think that is the impression that any of us was given when the transforming rehabilitation model was first proposed to us. We were led to expect something much richer, but in any event, it will be a real missed opportunity if Ministers do not now design women's centres not just to be places of diversion away from custody but to have a key role as reception institutions for women who are released from custody. This happens now with my women's centre, which has a very close relationship with Styal prison. It is really important that Ministers now define very clearly and carefully how they see that women's centre function meeting at the gate, and working through the gate, women who are being released from short sentences.

I have two final points. First, I welcome the further work that is to be done by Lord Farmer on family visits, but I just mention to Ministers that if it is correct that, as I have been told, family visits to approved premises are not being facilitated in the way that they are to prisons, that is ridiculous and nonsensical. Finally, the female offender strategy says some women would prefer video links to returning to court, and that may be true, but we should proceed with caution. As Transform Justice has shown, understanding, engagement and interpersonal dynamics are all affected when the offender is not present in the court room.

In conclusion, I hope that the courts Bill, which we still await, will properly address those concerns. There are issues that the all-party group on women in the penal system, in particular, would like to discuss further with Ministers.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am sorry but I have to impose a five-minute time limit on speeches.

7.30 pm

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) said it was the duty of a Government to protect their people, and obviously that is the case with prison, which ultimately serves two purposes—to remove freedom from criminals and therefore their opportunity to reoffend, and then to work with them so that they do not reoffend after they leave.

I spent the first 35 years of my life at one end of the spectrum, firmly believing that prison worked simply by removing criminals from circulation, and I thought it the best place for them. Immediately before becoming an MP, I went to work for YMCA Birmingham, which has accommodation for 300 formerly young homeless people and a 72-bed hostel in Northfield that typically serves as a place for people leaving prison to stay. We always ensured that senior members of staff were based at our various accommodation sites across the city, where we had an opportunity to meet residents every day, speak to them and understand their stories.

From that experience, it became much clearer to me that this was a more complex problem. My boss decided it would be appropriate for me to attend the Meridian course with an organisation called Common Purpose, and that gave us the opportunity to go into prisons and see the problem at first hand. We visited Featherstone Prison and Leicester Prison. It was at Leicester Prison in particular that I became aware of the challenge. Ralph Łubkowski, one of the deputy governors at the time, took us round the prison and explained some of the challenges—for example, preparing the menu for Christmas day: if it sounds too indulgent, the press say,
7.35 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): The primary role of prison must be to keep the public safe, and to achieve that sustainably we must keep prison officers and prison staff safe, but, as was highlighted by the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), since 2007 the number of assaults on prison staff has more than doubled while the number of prosecutions has remained very small. We need to put the law firmly on the side of those who protect us, whether through the private Member’s Bill being steered through the House by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill, or another legislative vehicle.

As this is an estimates day debate, I should mention that we must also consider ways in the current legislative framework to protect prison officers and prison staff and to reduce the number of assaults, whether on staff or other inmates. Evidence shows a strong correlation, at the very least, between the rise in the number of assaults and the increase in the use of psychoactive substances in our prisons, so I welcome the investment in tackling access to such substances and—linked to that—the threats posed by mobile devices in prisons and the use of drones around them.

Ultimately, our prisons should be places where staff and offenders are safe and prisoners are challenged and supported to make the most effective use of their time in custody and to better prepare themselves for when they leave prison. The £100 million investment in recruiting 2,500 extra prison officers will make possible the roll-out of the new offender management in custody model, which will improve how offenders are managed from the moment they enter prison until their release. The scheme will tackle reoffending and should help to keep staff in our prisons safer. Similarly, a key workers scheme has been developed to enable prison officers to case-manage between six and 10 prisoners, supporting and encouraging them to address their offending behaviour and to lead productive lives both while in prison and particularly once released.

Prisons need to be places of reform and rehabilitation, but we should remember that incarceration is a punishment for people who commit serious crimes. The people who work there must be protected and any risk to them minimised. While there will never be such a thing as lower risk in our prisons, there is certainly such as thing as lower risk, and that risk must always be managed and, where possible, reduced. Our jails must become places of safety, discipline and hard work, places where people are helped to turn their lives around. To achieve that, we must protect those who dedicate their lives to keeping us safe.

7.38 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): In preparing for this debate, I went to the Ministry of Justice website to look at its strategic priorities, and one of them is for a global Britain that promotes the rule of law.

Those of us interested in the rule of law know that Lord Bingham’s eight principles of the rule of law include that it must afford adequate protection of fundamental human rights. Last Thursday, I attended a workshop in Geneva under the auspices of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The purpose of the workshop was to discuss and share experiences of human rights monitoring within Parliaments across the world.

My remit was to speak about the work of the Joint Committee on Human Rights in this Parliament, of which I am a member, and the Equality and Human Rights Committee at the Scottish Parliament.

I regret to say that it was clear to me from some of the soundings that I took while I was in Geneva that the UK’s impending withdrawal from the European Union, this Parliament’s rejection of the charter of fundamental rights and the Windrush scandal had severely dented international opinion about respect for human rights in the UK. I know that those concerns are shared by my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament, which, unlike this one, has voted to keep the charter after we leave the EU. I also know that they are shared by Members from all parties in the House. Indeed, last week’s damning report from the Joint Committee on Human Rights on the detention of the Windrush generation is an important example of Members on both sides of the House—from all parties and, in the case of peers, from no party—coming together to draw attention to an abuse of human rights that was perpetrated in this country by a Department.

Today, however, we must focus on finance and budgets. Another facet of the rule of law is access to justice. Lord Bingham said that the law should provide that access, especially when people could not resolve interpersonal disputes themselves. Others who have spoken today
have touched on the provision of legal aid in England and Wales. I want to take the time that I have left to draw attention to a recent review of the legal aid system in Scotland, which was commissioned by the Scottish Government. It was not an internal review, like the UK Government’s review of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012, but an independent strategic review that looked at the current system and made recommendations for the future.

The review found that although the Scottish Government spend less per capita on legal aid than the UK Government spend in England and Wales, the scope of legal aid in Scotland is broader and a larger percentage of the population is eligible. At this point, I should perhaps declare an interest. At present, I am a non-practising member of the Scottish Bar, but I have done a great deal of legal aid work in the past. I know that lawyers like to moan from time to time that the rates are not as lucrative as they may be in other fields of work, but that is probably inevitable.

The report of the review shows the contrast between what is done with a smaller budget in Scotland and what happens in England and Wales. According to last year’s figures from the Ministry of Justice, legal aid expenditure in England and Wales has been cut from £2.51 billion to £1.55 billion in real terms in a few short years. In England, that has led to a substantial reduction in the scope of family, social welfare, debt, housing and immigration cases. We do not have the same problem in Scotland: although we are spending less per capita, legal aid is still available for such cases.

The report compares publicly funded legal assistance in Scotland with that in other European countries. On page 16, the author explains that it is difficult to do that, because legal systems are different in different countries, and there are differences between jurisdictions. However, it is possible to provide a general comparison between the Scottish legal aid programme and those in other European countries. In 2002, the Council of Europe established the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice, which publishes biennial detailed comparisons of the justice systems of the 47 Council of Europe members.

The review examined three key areas of legal aid to compare the service in Scotland with those in other jurisdictions: scope, eligibility and cost. In relation to scope, it found that the provision of criminal legal aid in Scotland compared very well with other systems. In almost all criminal cases prosecuted before a jury, the accused will receive legal aid, which, potentially, will pay for the best criminal defence lawyers available. When it comes to civil legal aid, the scope in Scotland is broader than those in many other jurisdictions, with comparatively few areas excluded. As for eligibility, approximately 70% of the Scottish population are eligible, on the basis of income, for a degree of civil legal aid to fund at least part of their actions. That is one of the highest levels of eligibility in Europe. As regards cost, Scotland’s expenditure per capita exceeds €30. The European average is €9, and the median is €2. The figure in England and Wales is €38.14, and in Scotland it is €33.28.

Scotland is one of the leading jurisdictions in Europe in the provision of legal aid on the basis of scope, eligibility and expenditure. Internationally, its legal aid programme is also recognised for its independence from the Government and the public accountability of its legal aid authority. I draw attention to that because, sadly, in the past few years—there have been many speeches about this in the House, and I am sure that there will be more during the evening—there has been much criticism of LASPO. In 2016, Amnesty International said that cuts under the 2012 Act had created a two-tier justice system in England and Wales. Earlier this year, a Ministry of Justice report, leaked and then reluctantly released, told of judges’ concern about the number of people facing criminal charges without a lawyer in England and Wales.

I have drawn attention to the legal aid system in Scotland not because it is perfect—indeed, the independent strategic review suggested changes—but because it shows that with less spending per capita, it provides wider eligibility and a far wider scope.

Alex Chalk: Is the hon. and learned Lady’s experience from Scotland that broadening access to early advice and assistance can help litigants to understand the strengths and weaknesses of potential litigation and perhaps even to decide not to pursue it?

Joanna Cherry: Absolutely. I think that in any system, early access to a lawyer, before the litigation stage and before parties become entrenched, is vital.

I must draw my speech to a close, because I am conscious of time. I have three questions for the Minister. Does he agree that the Scottish experience shows that, with less spending per capita, it is possible for legal aid to involve a wider scope and more eligibility? Will he look to the Scottish example? Will he consider commissioning, rather than an in-house review of LASPO, an independent strategic review of legal aid in England and Wales similar to the one commissioned by the Scottish Government?

7.46 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for making the debate possible.

The House needs to give much more scrutiny to the Ministry of Justice. The changes that are under way are unprecedented, threatening access to justice and even to the rule of law. Our justice system has two key functions: to defend our hard-won rights and the rule of law and to help to keep communities safer with fewer victims of crime. Tory cuts are undermining both those functions. By the end of this decade, the Ministry’s budget will have been slashed by 40%, more than the budget of any other Department. In cash terms, that is nearly £4 billion a year, and it explains the crisis that is affecting our justice system.

The estimate that we are debating shows that cuts amounting to hundreds of millions more are to come. That risks turning the current crisis into a full-blown emergency. Much of what we value in our justice system is being sacrificed on the altar of free-market dogma, austerity and privatisation. No doubt, we will hear excuses for the cuts this evening, but it was a political choice. We have just marked the eighth anniversary of the infamous emergency Budget from the now editor of the loss-making Evening Standard, which led to tax cuts for corporations worth £110 billion alone, but to public service cuts for everyone else.
The Tories thought that the MOJ cuts would be cost-free—out of sight, out of mind—but that is not true. There are real human costs. A single mother battling a dodgy landlord can no longer obtain legal support. A young family who are forced to skip meals after a flawed benefits decision can no longer get help from their law centre, which has been shut down. A migrant—or even a person who looks like a migrant to some—faces deportation without legal advice. A young worker cannot afford to take an exploitative boss to an employment tribunal because of the unlawful fees imposed by the Tories.

Alex Chalk: I am sure that we are all enjoying the debate, but must the hon. Gentleman not accept that in 2010 his party's Government left the country with a deficit of £150 billion—which, by the way, is about 20 times the entire Ministry of Justice budget? Does he not want to take some responsibility for that?

Richard Burgon: The Conservatives need to take responsibility for their giveaway to billionaires. If balancing the books is so important, why give billions away to those people?

Whole communities are affected by rising crime, because under the privatised probation system offenders are bizarrely dealt with over the phone. Young people are threatened by street violence because of the Government’s decision to cut Youth Justice Board funding in half. On this side of the House, we will be fighting every single one of the cuts that the Government plan for the justice system over the next period, because we cannot do justice on the cheap. Our communities should not pay the price.

Turning to prisons, the Conservatives recklessly axed nearly 7,000 prison officers from 2010. These layoffs are the root cause of much of the unprecedented levels of violence and chaos in our prisons. Faced with a crisis of their own making, the Government have recruited 3,000 new officers over the past 18 months, yet there are still over 4,000 fewer frontline officers now than in 2010.

There is no clarity on whether there is extra money to recruit any more officers. If so, how much? Are the Government committing to reversing all the prison officer posts cut since 2010? If not, how many new officers will be recruited by 2020, and when will they be on the landings? In short, when will there be sufficient staffing to keep both inmates and staff safe?

This is not just a simple numbers game. Officers with many tens of thousands of years of collective experience have been lost since 2010. That is creating a dangerous cocktail of inexperienced officers and experienced prisoners. What is the Government strategy to end this exodus of experienced officers from our prisons? This year’s real-terms pay cut of £980 a year will only make retention more difficult. Do the Government have any intention of ending below-inflation pay awards for prison officers? Labour would do so.

What about the new female offender strategy? Good ideas, and even good intentions, are not enough. Even the Minister’s former ministerial colleague has said this strategy is not properly funded. The Government’s own advisers say this plan faces a £15 million shortfall. With no serious funding, it risks being yet another missed opportunity for reform. Likewise, the Government’s new education and employment strategy seems to be based on governors doing more with less—another recipe for failure.

As the prisons budgets are cut, the push for outsourcing and privatisation increases. Some people might even suggest that that is the intention. It is clear that we cannot hand over huge swathes of the justice system to mega-corporations and expect anything other than profit to be put first. We need only look at Serco’s role in ripping off the public by overcharging for tagging prisoners, including dead prisoners. That is so serious that there is an ongoing Serious Fraud Office investigation against Serco, yet it somehow continues to have £3.6 billion-worth of contracts with the Ministry of Justice; given the new Justice Minister’s previous role as spin-doctor-in-chief at Serco that is something we will all need to be shining a light on.

Beyond Serco, public cash was thrown at Amey and Carillion for prison maintenance works despite cells being rat-infested and left in disrepair. And beyond Serco, the Sodexo-run Peterborough Prison recently became the first women’s prison in years deemed not safe enough by inspectors, and the G4S Oakhill child prison is no better, yet last week the Government announced yet another privately financed prison and are preparing the ground for more to follow. So I want to make one thing clear to the Government and to those who wish to bid for any new private prisons: a Labour Government will end the discredited outsourcing of prison maintenance works and bring them back in house. We will oppose the building of more private prisons. We will put an end to the wasteful scandal of PFI in our prison system. And we will use every power possible to bring the work of underperforming private sector companies in our prisons back in-house at the earliest opportunity.

Of course, the Tory privatisation of probation has not just put the public at greater risk, but has left the taxpayer out of pocket, just as we warned it would. The Select Committee on Justice recently labelled this part-privatisation a “mess”; yet the companies delivering this mess received £342 million in a bail-out last year. Imagine what we could have done to transform our justice system with those resources, instead of giving them to line the pockets of private companies.

Press reports suggest even more changes to the contracts to boost the profits of the private companies. We in the Opposition will oppose that all the way. The Government should stop rewarding failure. They should commit today that not one penny more will go on bailing out these failing companies, and then they should terminate their contracts. Probation should be brought back in-house where it can focus on reoffending rather than making profits for private companies.

Justice and access to justice have been seriously undermined by the Tory cuts agenda. With sweeping cuts to legal aid, this cruel Tory Government are not only attacking people’s living standards but deliberately undermining their ability to defend themselves against those very same attacks. When people cannot afford to enforce their rights, those rights are worth nothing more than the paper they are written on—so much for equality before the law.

At last, the Government have launched a review of their legal aid polices, but if they are serious about reversing the damage, proper funding is needed. That means
new Treasury money, not more rearranging of the deckchairs. We need to fund legal aid properly; we need to value legal aid and access to justice.

Finally, I raise our concerns about the funding of our courts. A £1 billion-plus courts reform programme is under way that will fundamentally change the way justice is delivered in this country, but it is being done with no real piloting, with no parliamentary or public scrutiny, and without legislation, and with financial decisions that could lead to long-term costs for our justice system—and it seems that it is in danger of coming off the tracks.

7.56 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart):

May I begin by thanking colleagues for their contributions? It is very striking in justice debates how much learning and experience there is around the House; almost every Member who has spoken is either a distinguished ex-prisons Minister or has worked as a solicitor or criminal barrister, and brings deep passion to their work. I also want briefly to pay tribute to the fact that this debate has generally, with perhaps a single exception, been conducted in a very practical, non-ideological, focused fashion, with great charm and commitment and a deep and pragmatic understanding of the individual issues, without lapsing in any way into lazy clichés or any slogans prepared perhaps for YouTube. I also want to thank the officials whose work underlies most of this debate. We owe a huge debt of gratitude, as many have pointed out, to our judiciary, in particular the criminal Bar, which underpins a lot of the respect in which Britain is held throughout the world.

On prisons, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian C. Lucas) who kindly picked out Amy Rees and Russ Trent for the work they have done in communicating their work in Berwyn, and also to the prison officers on the landing, who my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) pointed out are taking on the most extraordinarily challenging and often very dangerous job, day in, day out.

The core of this debate, however, was set out by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill): the fundamental paradox at the heart of this discussion that, on one hand, justice is not a transaction, but on the other hand, it is demand-led. Somewhere between the deep values of justice—the values that my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk) connected so exactly to our national identity—and the constraints imposed by population and funding lie many of the problems that Members have touched on today.

The right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) talked, in a very valuable speech, about many of the problems and challenges in our justice system; my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham extended them to the courts system; the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) found many of those issues within probation; and again the right hon. Gentleman connected this forensically to the questions within both the main estimates and the supplementary estimates over the past four years. I would of course, as expected, want to point out that there have been some elements of progress and some things we should be proud of, but I will come back to the challenges towards the end of my speech, and in particular to the comments of the right hon. Gentleman, who rightly asked how we are going to deal with them; I will wish to finish on that practical question.

First, however, I want to talk about the achievements. A number of things have happened. One of them, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) pointed out, is the transformation in the supervision of offenders on short-term sentences, and in particular, in the supervision of an extra 40,000 offenders during the first 12 months after leaving a short-term custody. The hon. Member for Wrexham used the example of Berwyn to highlight the development of the new prison programme and the 10,000 new places that will be provided through those prisons, with public capital coming forward for the prison in Wellingborough and a private finance initiative for the prison at Glen Parva. Those new prison places, which will ultimately house 20,000 prisoners, will make a huge difference. It is often tawdry buildings—some of them Victorian, some of them more recently built—that underlie the real problems relating to dignity, cleanliness and everyday life that contribute directly to violence.

Ian C. Lucas: May I point out to the Minister that Berwyn is a public sector prison that was delivered on budget and on time, and in which a lot of hope is invested? Why have the Government excluded the public sector from tendering for the new prisons that he is referred to?

Rory Stewart: Wellingborough will be built with public capital. Glen Parva, on the other hand, will be a private finance initiative. We believe in having a mixed economy. That is partly because we think that there are things we can learn from the private sector. The public sector remains the core of our prison estate, and we owe the sector an enormous debt of gratitude, but in Thameside, Altcourse, Park and elsewhere, we have learned about family centres and about technology—particularly in Thameside, with the use of in-cell telephony and computers. At Altcourse, we have learned a great deal about workshops and employment. There is a great deal that we can learn from each other.

The hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston was kind enough to pick out some of the positive elements in the female offender strategy, and I would like to take this opportunity of welcoming the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), to his place. I think that he will do an enormous amount for the youth estate, for female offenders, and for the general principle, which we all support across the House, that women should not be in custody unless it is absolutely necessary. We have also made progress, through Lord Farmer, in our approach to families. In the past two weeks, we have achieved smoke-free prisons, and we have now managed to announce new policies on scanners for intercepting drugs, of which I am proud.

We also have 2,500 extra prison officers, which we have perhaps spoken about too much in this House, but they are important because they drive our ability to deliver the key worker system. That system will involve a relationship between one prison officer and six prisoners, and for at least 45 minutes a week, an individual conversation about a prisoner’s sentence plan and education plan. That will be an important element in bringing
decency and reducing violence. Body-worn cameras and doubling the sentences for people attacking prison officers will also be an important part of restoring some of the civility and decency that we need in order to bring about rehabilitation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South pointed out.

I wish to conclude by addressing the question posed by the right hon. Member for Delyn. He asked how we were going to do all that in a tight financial situation. From my point of view, the answer is that there are of course no silver bullets. Everyone in this Chamber, on both sides, has enormous experience of the system that has existed in this country for a very long time. In fact, there is a prison in my constituency that is almost 2,000 years old; it is a Roman prison. There are no simple answers to the question of how we balance punishing someone and isolating them from the public with doing the difficult work of turning around their life and preventing reoffending.

However, the central lesson—which my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) put his finger on—is training. In the end, this is going to come down to the individual relationship between the prison officer and the prisoner. It is going to come down to the confidence they have to unlock their prisoner, to how they deal with violence and assaults, to how they push towards reoffending and to how they develop in their everyday engagements such as a decision on a telephone call, on a blanket or on a family visit. It is going to come down to the sense of trust and predictability that will ultimately turn around the lives of prisoners. More than 40% of our prisoners have come out of care. More than 50% have been excluded from school. Similarly, more than 50% have not achieved the reading level of an 11-year-old. It is going to take patience and resilience to turn that around.

This training cannot just be about super-governors parachuting in to turn around troubled prisoners and then leaving, only for the system to collapse again. A resilient system is one in which the uniformed prison officers at band 3, band 4 and band 5, in their pride, their purposefulness and their courage, will demonstrate that they can achieve remarkable things. The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) highlighted this achievement in Perth prison, which is an extraordinary example of a decent regime being run in a tough local prison in Scotland. Prisons in this country are already achieving remarkable things in places such as Dartmoor and Altcourse, and even in some of the toughest prisons such as Leeds. If we can get those elements of training and leadership together, I believe that even in a tough financial climate, with all the pressures of the financial crisis and with all that we owe the national health and education systems, we can deliver a prison system that works for prisoners and ultimately protects the public.

8.6 pm

Robert Neill: This has been a most useful and well-informed debate. I am grateful to the Minister for his response, and we will undoubtedly return to a number of these matters, both with him and with the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, my hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Edward Argar), whom I and my Committee members also welcome. I value the comments that have been made. It is right that we are ambitious and bold and have breadth of vision, and it is also right that we are practical. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) referred in his powerful speech to the importance of family. As a practical measure, to demonstrate breadth of vision, and relating to estimates, perhaps the Ministry will look again at the reduction of £250,000 in support for the family drug and alcohol court’s national unit, which has been described by Sir James Munby, the president of the Family Division, as the most significant development in family law for 40 years. For the sake of saving £250,000 out of the departmental spending limit of £6.9 billion, it would be a shame to lose the vision that those courts and other initiatives bring.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).
Department of Health and Social Care and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government


Motion made, and Question proposed, That,—

(1) for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Department of Health and Social Care:
(a) further resources, not exceeding £61,592,567,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,
(b) further resources, not exceeding £3,634,818,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and
(c) a further sum, not exceeding £62,184,741,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament; and

(2) for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government:
(a) further resources, not exceeding £17,571,313,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,
(b) further resources, not exceeding £4,003,853,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and
(c) a further sum, not exceeding £12,311,628,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—[Rebecca Harris.]

8.7 pm

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): It is an honour to speak in this estimates day debate on the 70th anniversary of the NHS. I am privileged and proud to have worked in the NHS for 24 years before coming to this place, and I would like to start by saying thank you to all those who work in the NHS. The principle behind it is as strong now as it was on the day it first opened its doors: it should be free at the point of delivery, available to all, and based on need, not the ability to pay. That is as important now as it ever was; it is truly the thing that makes us most proud to be British. This is not just the anniversary of the NHS; however, it is also the 70th anniversary of the National Assistance Act 1948, which swept away the poor laws and introduced our system of social care, so it is absolutely right that we should be having this joint estimates day debate.

I absolutely welcome the uplift in funding announced by the Prime Minister, but I would like to talk about how we will get the most from those funds, and also how we will pay for this. One of the key challenges that we have long faced is that although the NHS is free at the point of delivery, social care has been means-tested from the outset. That has created a huge challenge in bringing the systems together and providing the integration that patients expect but often find, to their surprise, is not there. Moving towards more integration would have great benefits for patients, and would create savings and a much more logical, patient-centred approach for both systems. I urge the Minister to look closely at the report of both Committees into social care, in which we touched on that issue and made recommendations, which I will talk more about later.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): My hon. Friend is providing an excellent introduction to this debate. Does she agree that both Front-Bench teams could look at the example of Torbay Council—the local authority we share—which now has an integrated care organisation that brings together adult social care and the NHS for the benefit of our local residents?

Dr Wollaston: Indeed; Torbay has led the way. When the Health and Social Care Committee visited Norway and Denmark, we were shown slides from Torbay, because its approach, referring to a Mrs Smith and actually trying to envisage how everything would work around the patient, has been hugely influential abroad as well as at home.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Health and social care within Greater Manchester has been devolved to the Mayor. Does my hon. Friend agree that Greater Manchester will hopefully lead the way in demonstrating the opportunities presented by combining health and social care?

Dr Wollaston: Yes, and I am going to say more about that, because Manchester has benefited from transformation funding. I want to talk about not only the benefits of integration, but how we can ring fence transformation funding. I welcome my hon. Friend’s comments.

Returning to the recent announcement, a £20.5 billion a year uplift by 2023-24 for NHS England is welcome and represents a 3.4% average increase over five years. Importantly, it is front loaded, with 3.6% in the first two years, and comes on top of £800 million that has already been promised to fund the Agenda for Change pay rises. However, the announcement should not be the end of the story, because it refers only to NHS England and does not include social care, public health, capital or, importantly, training budgets—staffing is crucial to making all this work.

Of course, the Prime Minister acknowledged that and promised to come forward with a settlement for social care and public health in the autumn. However, we need to be clear right from the outset that we must have a social care settlement that reflects demographic changes, because we will need an increase of 3.9% in funding just to stand still. If we want to do something to address quality and to allow social care to do more, we need to go substantially further. That will be essential if we want to get the most out of the settlement that has already been announced for NHS England.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Returning to the hon. Lady’s point about public health not being part of the recent announcement, has she seen the 2017 review that highlighted that there is a return of over £14 for every pound spent on local and national public health policies? It therefore makes economic sense to invest in public health, not to cut it in any future announcement.

Dr Wollaston: I absolutely agree. This is about not just funding for public health, but the policy levers. We do not need lots of talk about the “nanny state” that denigrates important national public policy drivers,
because although we need funding for local services, as the hon. Lady says, this is also about the policy environment that is necessary to make important changes. Investing in public health makes a huge difference for people.

One of the problems here is that when the public are asked where they would like the priorities to fall, we often hear, understandably, about the importance of cancer outcomes, mental health and emergency waiting times. Public health is often bottom of the list because nobody necessarily knows when their life has been saved by a public health policy. The reality is that the major changes and achievements relating to life expectancy have arisen largely thanks to public health policy, but we rarely turn on the television and see a programme called “24 Hours in Public Health”, which is a shame.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): In the air quality debate last Thursday, I touched on the need for health in all policies. From active transport to quality of housing, is that not where we need to drive public health?

Dr Wollaston: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Health in all policies means using every opportunity to maximise public health. When Departments work together, such as on the childhood obesity strategy, we need maximum engagement across the whole of Government to make that effective. The way it was put to us when the Committee visited Amsterdam was that it should be viewed as a sandbag wall, and if any part of it is missing, we are not going to achieve what we want. That applies to all of public health.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): To echo the point that has just been made, the hon. Lady will be aware that I presented a ten-minute rule Bill in April about having health in all policies. Does she agree that the Government should reinstate the Cabinet Office Sub-Committee on public health so that the entire machinery of government can come together to ensure that we do everything possible to keep people well, rather than having a service that treats people when they are sick?

Dr Wollaston: Absolutely. It is essential that we use every mechanism at our disposal to ensure that Departments work together. Public health is mostly delivered in the community, so we need that to happen at the local level, too. Councils should be reaching out into their communities and ensuring that they use every opportunity to deliver health in all areas when it comes to prevention.

One of the most welcome aspects of the funding settlement is that it is long term. For too long we have limped from one short-term sticking plaster to another, so I particularly welcome the fact that we now have certainty over five years combined with a 10-year long-term plan. In the Minister’s response, I ask her to reflect on the recommendation from the House of Lords Select Committee on the Long-Term Sustainability of the NHS for an office of health and care sustainability to do long-term horizon scanning. That means not just future demographic challenges, but long-term workforce planning, which has always been a huge challenge within the health service. Brexit, for example, has implications for not just the workforce, and there are many other challenges ahead, so it would be helpful to have an independent body that could consider such things and help to work out the necessary long-term funding.

My final points are about how we fund the new system. I would be delighted if there was a Brexit dividend, but I am afraid that I do not believe that there will be. I think there will be a Brexit penalty. The difficulty with people thinking that everything might be solved by a mythical future fund means that we are not levelling with them right at the outset that we are all going to have to pay for it. The challenge should be about how to distribute the cost fairly. That is the key point here.

I want to stop here to thank the citizens’ assembly that worked with my Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee. I also thank the Chair of that Committee, the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), for the Committee’s diligent work on this issue.

Going back to fairness, when I was in practice, it always came as a huge shock to my patients when they realised that if they had what might be really quite modest assets, they would have to fund all their social care. That shock was striking when the citizens’ assembly considered the matter. If we are to move to a properly funded system, it must look at the quality of social care, which is precarious in nature, and at the provider challenge. We must be realistic, and we have to make it clear that somebody has to pay. We cannot just put it off to future generations; we have to think about it and explain to the public what that means.

That is why, unusually, our Select Committee makes recommendations to both Front-Bench teams, because the failure to address this has been a political failure. On the one hand, measures suggested by the Labour party have been denounced by my party as a “death tax” and, on the other, my party’s suggestions have been denounced as a “dementia tax”, and that means we get nowhere.

If we are to avoid having the same discussion in five years’ time, we need to be clear about how we will get this across the line. That will require, particularly in a hung Parliament, the co-operation of both sides of the House. I therefore urge both Front-Bench spokespeople to commit to working together.

Members on both sides of the House have repeatedly said that we are prepared to form a parliamentary commission to go out and engage with the public, rather as Adair Turner did on the difficult issue of pensions, regarding what fairness means. We cannot offload this entire cost on to a relatively shrinking pool of working-age employed adults. We need to have a conversation that reaches out to everybody and asks, “What is the fair payment?”, and in return we must make sure those extra payments are earmarked for the NHS and do not just disappear into wider Government funding.

How we do that will mean conversations about national insurance with the self-employed, and it will mean conversations with people in retirement about their own contributions. We cannot put the cost entirely on to young people, many of whom are already, in effect, paying a graduate tax of 9% on everything they earn over £25,000. That would not pass the fairness test.

I am afraid that least fair thing of all would be for us to duck this challenge and leave even more people without the care they need, with disastrous consequences for them, for their loved ones and for their carers,
because it falls into the “too difficult” box. This is difficult, but we need to grasp it, explain it to people and come to a decision.

Several hon. Members rose——

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I just say to Members that they have six minutes each.

8.22 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to take part in this debate in the week we celebrate the NHS’s 70th birthday. I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), the Chair of the Health and Social Care Committee, of which I am proud to be a member, for all the important work she does.

Many of us have been active, particularly in the past week, in doing lots of work on our local health services and in campaigning on national things. Today’s debate is important because it comes in the wake of a number of reports. We have obviously had the report from our Select Committee, which considered the long-term funding of adult social care. In the past few weeks alone, my colleagues on both sides of the Committee and I have attended the presentation of reports on the funding of health and social care from the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the Health Foundation, co-ordinated by the NHS Confederation. We have seen reports from the Institute for Public Policy Research and a number of others.

Collectively, all those reports, including our own, have raised the challenges that our health and social care system faces, and those challenges are not news. We are not sharing a new story, and, in the context of this debate, it is not just about the money that is available for our NHS. Ultimately, we are all here because we want to ensure that we continue to have a national health service that is free at the point of use for all who need it, and that goes hand in hand with the provision of social care.

In my city of Liverpool, we have seen social care devastated in the eight years since 2010. We have seen our Government grant slashed by 60%. Social justice is a real issue, because we know that the north of England has been particularly and disproportionately hit by cuts to local authority budgets. Those cuts have been larger in the most deprived areas. Looking at the figures, we see that the 30 councils with the highest levels of deprivation have made cuts to adult social care of 17% per person, compared with 3% per person in the 30 areas with the lowest levels of deprivation.

That cannot be right, and it pains me, particularly when I speak to constituents on a weekly basis who are affected by this, because they have seen their social care packages taken away, or now cannot access them, or they have seen family members stuck in hospital because there is no social care package for them when they are ready to leave, and/or they are turning up at the doors of A&E because they are not receiving social care in their home.

Diana Johnson: Will my hon. Friend comment on the social care precept that local authorities can use to raise additional funding? In the poorest areas, because the council tax base is so low, the precept does not generate sufficient money to fill the gap and provide social care.

Luciana Berger: I thank my hon. Friend for that important contribution. To give an idea of what it is like in Liverpool, we do not raise enough in council tax to cover our social care bill alone. That is before we consider all the other services that our local authority has a responsibility to provide in our area. This is a critical issue. The onus has now been transferred to local authorities, with all the costs that come with it, and it is particularly difficult. We have seen a reduction of 7% in the total number of people in receipt of a care package, yet in the same period we have seen demand for support—measured by the number of referrals and requests for help—rise by 40%.

It is important that in this debate we are considering not just the funding that goes to health—we have heard the hon. Member for Totnes speak eloquently about the funding announcement and some of the challenges in what is not included. In particular, we are waiting to see what funding there will be for social care. We cannot divorce social care funding from the NHS. The two go hand in hand, and this is a critical issue—our Select Committee heard evidence on that only today.

The Minister has heard about this on many occasions—one of my hon. Friends will be raising this later, too—but the sleep-in care crisis is a particular issue for social care. Not only do we have this chronic underfunding in the care sector but we are also seeing a complete lack of Government guidance on payments for historical sleep-in care shifts. Social care providers, many of them in the charitable and voluntary sector, are facing a back bill of £400 million, and one provider has already been forced to close. A recent survey found that two thirds of those charities are now at risk of going out of business, and the Government urgently need to address the situation.

I listened closely to what the Minister had to say at Health and Social Care questions, and I hope she might have a new answer for us today, because this situation cannot continue. We had a meeting in Parliament where we heard at first hand from not only providers but people in receipt of care, some of them personal budget holders who will be personally liable to Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs when they are expected to pay back this historical claim. I hope that the Government and this Minister will share with this House exactly what they are going to do on that, because time is ticking by and by March of next year these providers are expected to pay, as I understand it, £400 million. That could be a serious further detriment to the care sector.

I wish to finish by talking about something a little different, although echoing some of what we have just heard, on the issue of prevention and how we keep people well, which is important in the context of this debate. As I have said, many things have not been included in the Government’s announcement of the funding that is coming to our NHS. We do not know about transformation funding, capital spend or funding for Health Education England for the education of staff. All these elements are very important, but of particular importance is public health spending, which has been decimated over the past few years, to the extent where, as we have heard just today, smoking cessation services have been cut by
more than 30% in the past year alone. That is just one example and it is not commensurate with the reduction in people smoking in our country. We need to think actively and urgently about how we have a wholesale reappraisal of how we keep people well in this country.

I want to ensure we have a national health service in 70 years’ time. It is all very well celebrating the anniversary today, but when it is increasingly contending with lifestyle-related disease, we have to be doing everything possible to keep people well, and that starts from conception. We have to address the whole area of what we do for the newborn related disease, we have to be doing everything possible today, but when it is increasingly contending with lifestyle-related disease, we have to be doing everything possible to keep people well, and that starts from conception. We have to address the whole area of what we do for the newborn.

Mr Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford) (Con): I, too, wish to address the issue of adult social care and the excellent joint report—admittedly, I say that as a Committee member who helped to produce it. The issue is of immense concern to many of my constituents, not least the poor souls I have had to help, who were trying to fight this battle, which Members will recognise, somewhere between NHS funding and social care. May I also strongly support the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) about the principle of our bringing our Committees together? That collaborative principle, which we have shown in Committee, is one I hope both our Front-Bench teams, Labour and Conservative, will now follow. Frankly, the public are tired of party political point scoring on this issue.

I wish to touch on two subjects in the five and a bit minutes I have: integrated healthcare and funding. The Secretary of State has rightly highlighted one principle, namely that we should have whole-person, integrated care, with the NHS and social care systems operating as one. I strongly agree with that. I have seen too many people caught in that system I described, somewhere between NHS funding and social services, and trying to fight that battle with those two fundholders. That binary system has to end. It will not be easy, but the report highlights a number of practical steps. However, I say to the House that for the process of integration to work properly, those two separate funding streams have to become one. Whatever operational or managerial changes are made, if there continue to be two separate funding streams, patients will not experience the benefits. If one accepts that principle of a single funding stream, it is only logical that both clinical and social care be delivered free at the point of use.

I know that that is a major decision and a major financial commitment, but it is essential if the public are to see integration as being of practical benefit. After all, at the moment they see a lottery of disease. They see that if someone gets a major heart problem, the NHS will pay, no questions asked, but if they get dementia and need personal care, the state will look to them and their family first before considering whether or not it should contribute. People feel that that is wrong, and I agree with them.

Let me turn to the vexed question of funding. I am a natural low-tax Conservative. I always think we should remember that when we talk about public spending, we are deciding how to spend other people’s money. But on this occasion if we are going to reset this system for the long term, we have to be honest: these changes will involve paying more, one way or the other. No single tax can solve this problem, as my Committee discovered. That is partly because of scale: the health budget alone is £121 billion. Secondly, the revenue generated needs to be flexible enough to cope with the periods of boom and bust, so drawing revenue from a range of sources is wiser. Thirdly, the current system operates at both a national and local level. That is why the Committee rightly looked at things such as council tax at a local level, where we need to replace the temporary surcharges with a complete overhaul of council tax, including re-bandining. The current bands and the fact that, for the most part, the valuations date back to 1991—both the Minister for Care and the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak), who are here today will understand that—show how overdue that reform is. Using council tax as a local element to this would generate additional revenue and would do so on a year-by-year basis. Of course, council tax is also adjustable to meet local demands, so council tax is one element of this.

The second element would be at a national level, because tax revenue will be needed to counterbalance the local council tax charges. That is why I strongly support the notion of a social care premium, which is in the report. Its sole purpose would be to transform and integrate our current health and social care systems. The Committee looked at two options in that regard, and Ministers may wish to look at how broad our consensus was, as it was an encouraging thing to see. One option would be for collection through the existing national insurance system, but separately identified on people’s payslips, with this charged to those 40 and above, including those over 65. That would be relatively easy to set up and run and it would be transparent for taxpayers.

The second option for a social care premium is a social insurance system like the one in Germany. The private sector—probably the not-for-profit insurers—would operate it, with all workers contributing to a pooled fund. I would like the flexibility of a German system, which would, for example, permit cash payments to families which better reflect individual needs in care.

The central point about a social care premium is that it would be acceptable to people if they could see that it would deliver the extra funds needed to integrate clinical and social care; address the rising demand, not least because of the increase in the number of those over 65; and end the healthcare lottery that people currently face. The report offers good ideas that will enable us not only to improve social care but to integrate it with clinical care. The key issue will be whether Ministers and their shadows are prepared to explore a collaborative approach to delivering those improvements.

I really do hope that Ministers will reflect on the report’s principles and individual proposals and that they and their Labour Front-Bench opposite numbers will step forward, perhaps in this debate, and spell out their willingness to work on a collaborative basis. If they do that, the report will have provided a lasting opportunity for real change.
8.36 pm

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): The first thing that I wish to highlight is my continuing concern about how wholly owned subsidiary companies are being established in the NHS largely to avoid the payment of VAT, which is not what Parliament intended. Although I recently spoke to people at the Treasury about this matter and they did not seem too concerned about the loss of VAT, it is not what Parliament intended in the estimates. It should be of concern to many Members that trusts are being forced down that route.

I also wish to highlight the tremendous work that has been done in the past few years by many of the Select Committees—some of the Chairs are present— including the Public Accounts Committee, on which I was proud to serve for two years. They have drawn attention to the dreadful state in which the NHS has been left over the past eight years, with the lowest growth in spending in any comparable period in its history. That has left a huge backlog of issues.

After several years of warning, tremendous hard work by Committees and scrutiny in this place, we have the welcome announcement on funding. It is just short of the average rise of 3.7%, but we are grateful for what we have got. The Secretary of State has set five tests to “show how the NHS will do its part to put the service onto a more sustainable footing”.

He has tasked the NHS with improving productivity, eliminating deficits, reducing unwarranted variation, getting better at managing demand and making use of capital. As well as those five tests, he also said that the NHS needed to be back on track on agreed performance standards, on locking in and further building on safety. That is an historic deficit—not in Bristol, but in our neighbouring authorities for which we are now responsible. If we run forward with that deficit over the next five years, that is another £30 million last year. We have an £83 million historic deficit—not in Bristol, but in our neighbouring authorities for which we are now responsible. If we run forward with that deficit over the next five years, that is another £30 million, plus, possibly, the £83 million that we already have. We are then getting very close to the £300 million that the £20 billion equates to in our local health economy.

All hon. Members can take the £20 billion and equate it with their own health economies and start to see what that money will really buy. The £300 million that this may equate to is also roughly equivalent to what is already being spent on the sustainability and transformation partnership said two years ago that it would be short of. This is a long way round and I excuse hon. Members for not keeping up with the numbers, but what I am essentially saying is that the money will allow us to stand still and not much else.

The coalition Government wanted to liberate the NHS, but instead they put a torpedo in the middle of it, fragmented it and then threw it all up in the air. People have done a remarkable job in keeping it going over the past few years. Why not try a different approach? Why do we not liberate the frontline to talk to us about what this money means? Why do we not look at the real demand in our health economies, what that money is and try to make sense of it for local people? Then we should talk to them about how much it would cost to have the level of service and treatment that they think they want. That would be a really liberating thing to do for all those managers and clinicians on the frontline.

Local transparency, local accountability, is the only way we can go in starting to square the circle of demand, quality and cost. MPs should not be let off the hook and kept outside the production of this new NHS plan and the way that it will be funded by our constituents over the next five months.

In this 70th year, the best present that politicians could give to the NHS would be to stop piling on the priorities, knowing that the money is not enough to meet them all, and to front up the political choices that we have asked people to make and our constituents to pay for.

8.42 pm

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth). In fact, all the speakers so far this
evening command the respect of both sides of the Chamber for obvious reasons given what they have said. I, too, agree with a large amount of what has been said. It is also a pleasure to speak in this very week of the 70th anniversary of the NHS.

We are talking this evening—it is in the Order Paper—about NHS expenditure summing to greater than £120 billion. That is a staggering sum and it just shows how important the NHS is not only to the Treasury and the Government, but, perhaps most importantly, to the public. Certainly, this is the top topic of interaction for my constituents. It is very, very important to them. The NHS is right up there with the royal family and the armed forces in making the Brits proud to be British, and for understandable reasons. I therefore very much welcome the £20.5 billion increase in real terms spending on the NHS. It is not only obviously needed because the population is ageing and the cost of healthcare is growing, but also desired by the British public. Some 86% of the British public say that they feel the NHS needs more spending. They are also willing to pay for it. It is very important that we listen to the public very carefully when they say that they need more spending on the NHS and that they are willing to pay for it. We will come in a moment to how they should pay for it. The British public are not stupid. They are fully and well aware that Government expenditure all comes from taxation, either now, immediately, or in the future in terms of debt. That is important, as they recognise that we cannot magic money out of thin air. We must also be very responsible and careful as politicians that we respect the fact that, whenever we decide that we wish to increase Government expenditure, what we are effectively doing is reaching into the pockets of hard-working people in this country and saying, “We’ll take some of that out, thank you very much.” We have to be really respectful of that and explain why we are doing it and what we are doing it for. The laziest thing to do in politics is pretend that other people are going to pay for all this and to promise the public that there is a cost when they miss an appointment, whenever an ambulance goes out unnecessarily and when people go to A&E but do not really need to do so. We need to be clear with people about NHS expenditure summing to greater than £120 billion. That is a staggering sum and it just shows how important it is to the public and the British public will eventually see through that approach.

If we are going to be straight with the British public, how will we achieve this increased expenditure? I am sceptical, but not as sceptical as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), about the Brexit dividend. I do, however, like to talk about a deficit dividend; as we reduce the massive amounts of interest that we are paying over time, there will be a benefit to the UK population. We have to be honest about where the money could come from, and hon. Members have mentioned other ideas about how it could be generated, including by looking at council tax, tax-free allowances and the pension age.

We do need to look at the pension age very carefully again. We have already increased the pension age to 67 and 68, but as the population ages and we all live longer, it is not unreasonable to expect us all to work longer. As we work longer, we generate more taxes during our lifetime, and that is pretty important. We have to consider whether it is reasonable that we should all be living 15 or more years after we have retired without paying more tax.

Dr Whitford: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the increase in life expectancy is actually stalling and not continuing to soar? Unfortunately, it is another inequality between richer areas and poorer areas, and the danger is that people in deprived areas will get no retirement at all.

Nigel Huddleston: The hon. Lady makes a perfectly valid point. The differentials in life expectancy concern me greatly, but we have come such a long way. Pensions were first introduced in 1908 for people aged 70, when the average life expectancy was 48 for men and 52 for women. Life expectancy increased slowly as the century went on, but I believe that it is now—quite staggeringly—78 for men and 82 for women. This is well beyond the average age at which we retire, so we have to look at the situation carefully.

Rather than directly tax people more, I would like to see economic growth, which was mentioned earlier. Every 1% increase in economic growth adds £7 billion to the economy, whereas every 1p increase in income tax raises just £5 billion. We have to look at having a good mix. The more that we can grow the economy the better. Owing to the growth in the economy, HMRC receipts actually increased from £414 billion in 2010-11 to £594 billion last year, so the more that we can do for economic growth, the better for us all.

Alternatively, we could shift Government expenditure from one Department to another, but that is very difficult to do in the age of austerity and perceived austerity. As a Conservative, I believe in Government spending that is as small as it can be, but as large as it needs to be. The message that I heard from my constituents at the last election is that they believe that it probably needs to be just that little bit bigger, particularly for health, social care and education.

The British public are now respecting and accepting the fact that Conservatives are very careful with their money and are respectful of taking tax and money out of their pockets. They know that we are not going to spend money willy-nilly. More than 60% of the British population—across all demographics, including party political persuasions, age groups and income groups—support a taxation increase to spend more money on the NHS, and we need to listen to that.

But we need to move the conversation away from being all about inputs. Everyone in this House needs to commit to avoiding this kind of arms war, whereby there is always a debate and a fight about who can spend most. Instead, we need to put much more focus on the outputs, such as improving diagnoses, treatments, survival rates and other matters in the NHS. That is part of the debate. I was glad that the Health Secretary focused on that while introducing the additional spending. It is an important factor to consider; productivity very much needs to be part of the deal.

We need to continue focusing on an NHS that is free at the point of need, but we need to be clear with people that it is not free. The NHS never has been free and never will be free. It comes at a cost and we all have to pay for it. We need to ensure that we keep focusing on cost, look at other areas of savings and educate the public that there is a cost when they miss an appointment, when an ambulance goes out unnecessarily and when people go to A&E but do not really need to do so. We should all play our part in ensuring that NHS money is spent as wisely and carefully as possible.

There is still a lot of work to do on social care and public health, as my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes said. We should try to put together a cross-party
royal commission, as other have said, and investigate moving the NHS out of party politics as much as possible, but that is a debate for another day.

8.49 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) and to speak in the estimates day debate to mark the 70th anniversary of our NHS—the most remarkable achievement of a Labour Government to provide free healthcare for all, free at the point of delivery.

I want to speak about King’s College Hospital—a major teaching hospital, tertiary referral hospital, and local district and general hospital in my constituency. There is a strong bond between local residents and King’s. I am proud that my mum worked at King’s as an occupational therapist for 10 years. Like so many local residents, I owe a personal debt of gratitude to the tremendously hard-working staff at the hospital. I was a surgical in-patient at King’s in my 20s, gave birth to both of my daughters there in my 30s, and have subsequently been an out-patient. My family rely on the A&E to be there when we need it. As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS, I pay tribute to the staff at King’s for their skill and professionalism, commitment and dedication, care and compassion.

King’s went through very challenging times during the 1980s and ’90s, but was completely transformed by Labour’s investment and NHS reforms. By 2010, the hospital had achieved a balanced budget every year and was meeting all its major targets. Since 2010, however, King’s has faced very significant and substantial challenges, driven principally by chronic underfunding and an enforced decision in 2013 to take on the management of Princess Royal University Hospital and Orpington Hospital when South London Healthcare NHS Trust failed. King’s now finds itself in special financial measures, with an annual deficit of £140 million.

While there are some areas where the trust can make improvements—and I know that staff are working as hard as they can to do so—many of the problems that it faces are outside its control. The Government’s funding model rewards elective surgery and penalises emergency work. King’s has a regional trauma centre and a stroke centre. It is one of a small number of London hospitals with a helipad. It has a busy accident and emergency unit and will soon open a new critical care unit. These specialisms save lives daily, but the funding model does not recognise this work. As a result, the hospital is grossly underfunded, even though London needs centres of emergency excellence such as King’s—no more so than during the Westminster and London Bridge terror attacks and the Grenfell Tower fire last year, when the team at King’s were at the forefront of the emergency life-saving response.

Last year the Government refused to allocate sustainability and transformation funding to King’s, in contrast to many other hospitals, resulting in the hospital’s already challenged financial situation becoming significantly worse. In the context of a sustained financial decline, the Government then decided to fine King’s for not achieving its already impossible financial control targets—even though it was the Government’s failure to provide adequate funding that led to the inability to meet these targets in the first place. Since King’s has been in special financial measures, the trust has been charged penal rates of interest on the money it has had to borrow to tackle the deficit it faces.

King’s does not have access to the capital funding it needs to undertake routine buildings maintenance and to invest in the infrastructure it needs to be able to be as efficient as possible. The Government love to recommend efficiency improvements. At King’s, efficiencies can be delivered if the buildings and outdated equipment are fit for purpose for the needs of patients in the 21st century. Both King’s and Maudsley Hospital across the road urgently need more funding to meet mental health needs in our communities. Too many local residents are ending up in mental health crisis because early intervention is not there, and too many of those patients spend far too long—often days at a time—waiting in accident and emergency at King’s for the mental health support that they need.

I raise these issues today because while any additional funding for the NHS is welcome, the problems at King’s cannot and will not be solved by 3.5% a year for five years. King’s needs new funding now to overcome its current challenges. It needs an end to the perverse policies of financial penalties for failing to meet impossible targets. It needs urgent capital funding to enable the Denmark Hill site in my constituency to be fit for purpose to meet patient needs. It needs revenue funding to enable it to recruit and retain the staff that it needs to run the hospital.

It is an appalling and unacceptable fact that as we mark the 70th anniversary of the NHS this week, one of the biggest teaching and research hospitals in the country, with such world-class life-saving and enhancing expertise, is in such a perilous financial state. This must be stopped. We owe it to the staff; we owe it to the patients. There is no way around the need for additional funding now. I call on the Government to acknowledge this challenge—to acknowledge the impossibility of the current situation at King’s with the current financial settlement and to step in to provide the funding it so desperately needs.

8.54 pm

Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): I draw Members’ attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests; I am a vice-president of the Local Government Association. I am pleased to take this opportunity created by the estimates to discuss adult care funding, given that a large percentage of the funding that local government administers relates to it.

I have been part of the joint Select Committee inquiry on the future of adult care. Before that, I led a county council with responsibility for adult care that had an adult care budget alone of around a quarter of a billion pounds. I then arrived as an MP just in time for Northamptonshire County Council to fall over financially, due in no small measure to adult care costs; addressing local versus national responsibilities for that are perhaps for a different time.

Adult care funding is a very important issue, and the solution to it requires bold thinking. Although the better care fund and the general funding in the estimates are welcome, they do not represent a solution; rather, they represent a temporary patch. When I was deputy chairman of the LGA, we had a presentation from the
King’s Fund in which it showed us reports that it had produced every year since 1999—this is very much a cross-party issue—saying, “This year must be the year that there is a solution to adult care funding.” That was in the last century. Integration is not the same as the NHS taking over. There will always be lines. With adult care, the next line would be housing, and I do not think anyone is suggesting that the NHS take over housing.

Colleagues have mentioned parity of esteem. Parity of esteem for employees is important institutionally. We speak a lot about the NHS. We are proud of it, and we are talking about its birthday, but often the NHS workers speak a lot about the NHS. We are proud of it, and we of esteem for employees is important institutionally. We are pleased to see that option retained in the recommendations of the joint Select Committee report. He is absolutely right about that. Figures in the inquiry showed that for the same work, social care workers were paid about 29% less on average than workers in the NHS.

Mr Clive Bets (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for the part he played in the joint Select Committee report. He is absolutely right about that. Figures in the inquiry showed that for the same work, social care workers were paid about 29% less on average than workers in the NHS.

Andrew Lewer: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment. It is about pay, but it is also about conditions and remembering that the health economy is much more than the NHS.

I believe, however, that more tax is not the solution, even if hypothecated and ring-fenced as road fund licence and national insurance were in their time. It is not wholly in tune with Conservative philosophy to suggest that higher tax rates equal higher tax revenue, and there is economic theory to back that up. The Laffer curve, for which the British economy in the 1970s was in many respects the laboratory, indicates that when a certain tax rate is reached, revenue goes down, not up. We are high on the Laffer curve already: 41% of GDP is Government spending in the last recorded figures, compared with 38% in 1988-89 and 34.5% in 2000-01. This is not about whether we need more—we do—but how to get it.

In general economic terms, productivity gains, as my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) said, and GDP growth per head are key to more funding going into adult care. In specific terms, an insurance approach with some elements of the German model has a great deal to commend it. I was very pleased to see that option retained in the recommendations of the joint Select Committee report.

8.59 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Northampton South (Andrew Lewer).

One thing I think we can all agree on is that we take our health for granted. We all get bogged down with everyday worries and problems, and all too frequently we hear the phrase, often from those who are more experienced, “Your health is the most important thing. Don’t take it for granted.” Of course, everyday life—education, work, family, bills and so on—are very real challenges that we all face, and it is sometimes easier just to hope for the best and go for the line. “Fingers crossed, it won’t happen to me.” The reality, however, is that at some point every one of us will experience either poor health or the likelihood of having to care for a loved one who is suffering.

My real concern is that our health and social care system is built on shifting sands, and there seems to be no long-term strategy from the Government for dealing with the challenges we face. We have an ageing population, a growing population and a population with more complicated health needs, yet we lack forward thinking and planning.

At the time of my election last June, the Care Quality Commission had found that one in four social care services was failing on safety grounds, with at least one care home closing every week, while only 2% of providers were regarded as outstanding. Our Prime Minister acknowledged that our social care system was not working, and promised to fix it—it was even in the Conservatives’ manifesto—but that promise has been broken. Since then, the Chancellor failed even to mention social care in the autumn Budget, and he missed another opportunity in the spring statement. The single departmental plan of the Health Secretary’s Department of Health and Social Care has failed to acknowledge the social care workforce. The result is that care providers up and down the country, including in my constituency, have been placed in special measures and face closure.

It is devastating to see people at breaking point because of this undignified and broken system. It is not just those in need of care who suffer, but their families. I recently visited a very good care home in my constituency, and I spoke to a gentleman who told me how wonderful his care was at that home. He also stated that he had now spent his life savings on his care, and would more than likely have to sell his home, which his children live in, to be able to continue to fund his necessary care. He expressed his regret at an unfair system, in which dignity in old age is determined by the amount of money people can pay.

I wish to draw on one particular issue that has not had the publicity it deserves, even though it threatens the viability of the care sector and could jeopardise the care of the most vulnerable people in our society. It is the Government’s mismanagement of the sleep-in crisis. I first learned about this issue when a senior council worker at Cheshire East Council was sacked after raising concerns about dozens of careworkers who had been paid less than the national minimum wage by the Conservative-run council, which had pledged to pay all its workers a living wage. Since then, one of the Conservatives’ own councillors has said that the council knew it was underpaying careworkers as early as 2014, adding that he would resign if he was proven wrong.

Unison brought a successful claim to an employment tribunal, where it was ruled that careworkers who sleep overnight in care homes are entitled to the national minimum wage for each hour that they are at work in what are referred to as sleep-in shifts. In February 2015, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy updated its guidance to reflect the court ruling, and this should have been the end of it. The Government, now knowing that their previous guidance was wrong, should have taken swift action to ensure that all careworkers received the back pay they were owed and were paid the national minimum wage.

Yet freedom of information requests have revealed that HMRC was instructed in February 2016 that staff were not entitled to the national minimum wage during sleep-in hours. In my opinion, this mistake is unforgivable. Over a year later, HMRC has finally started enforcing
complaints made by workers, who are in addition seeking six years of back pay to make up for missing wages. However, the Conservatives stopped this by delaying in July 2017, and again in September 2017. Incredibly, local authorities were not instructed to pay the national minimum wage for these sleep-in shifts until October 2017. From 2015 to 2017, careworkers were ignored.

A careworker in the constituency got in touch with me because he did not know where else to turn. He described how staff morale was at rock bottom, with many careworkers suffering from poor mental health, worrying about their job security, relying on food banks and payday loans, and being too scared to take time off sick and unable to afford going on annual leave.

Fiona Onasanya: Does my hon. Friend agree that we must not allow the sleep-in crisis to be kicked into the long grass? We must draw attention to it, and the Government must do something about it.

Laura Smith: I absolutely agree.

The careworker who contacted me described how careworkers feel that they have no voice and no respect. Is it any wonder that more than 900 careworkers leave their job every day? The way that this crisis is being handled is utterly disgraceful, and the Government have missed opportunity after opportunity to put things right. How can we expect the care sector to function, given all this uncertainty?

After years of continued mismanagement, the careworkers’ back pay bill is due in November. The reality is that the Government have never paid local authorities enough money to allow them to provide sleep-in shifts at the national minimum wage. We know from sector surveys that care providers cannot afford to pick up the Government’s tab. If they are made to do so, some will close and some will hand back contracts. Leaving the vulnerable people they support to find new careworkers and local authorities to struggle further. Some will be forced to cut the additional services they provide, such as those that help disabled people live more independent lives. Blackpool has already seen one care provider close. We do not have long until we start seeing the effects across the UK. It is vulnerable people and low-paid carers who will suffer.

The Government have had three years to get to this point, so where are their proposals for safeguarding the viability of the care sector? I ask the Government please not to wait any longer. The careworkers deserve better, the providers deserve better, and the citizens of this country deserve better.

9.6 pm

Mr Marcus Fysh (Yeovil) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), who spoke about King’s College Hospital. My father was a registrar in neonatology—he is a paediatrician—at King’s in the 1980s, so it is a hospital that I know well, and I am sympathetic to the challenges of an inner-city area. In my area we have a rural district hospital, which is very high quality and gets very good results, and the people there do an outstanding job. The hospital is in deficit and has been part of the vanguard transformation initiative, which has meant extra costs. Sometimes the benefits of working in new ways do not show in the money saved initially, because we have to wait for wider population health outcomes to be able to judge that.

Luciana Berger: The hon. Gentleman raises the important issue of how we transform care to ensure that we do the very best for patients. Does he share my concern—that was raised by the National Audit Office last Friday—that the vanguard programme has not delivered the depth or scale of transformation in service that was intended? Part of the reason is that there are not enough funds in the rest of the NHS to ensure that the transformation that we want to see can actually occur.

Mr Fysh: The hon. Lady makes a good point. It is about trying to understand when the effects will show up. Often what we have to do in the meantime is to run two parallel systems, in order to get one up and running, and that can be challenging. I welcome the extra money for healthcare but, as I said on Wednesday, we really should not allow it to crowd out other types of spending, particularly local government spending, which we have heard about in relation to social care.

In Somerset, the Conservative county council has undertaken nine years of efficiency savings. It has cut a lot of money out of its budget, but we are getting to the point where further cuts will make a significant difference to people’s lives and the provision of services. The Liberal Democrats left the county with nearly £400 million of debt. The repayments are £100,000 a day, which is really disappointing because we would much rather spend that money on services for the public. The county really needs about another £20 million. Ministers should look at whether the virements in the estimates are enough. I would like the amount in paragraph (2)(c) to be increased by £20 million to fund the very serious gap the county will otherwise have to make up through serious cuts to real people’s services.

It is worth highlighting the plight of children’s social care. The county has made great strides to deal with issues and modernise the service—it has spent a lot of money doing so—and that is an ambition we should all espouse. The difference between children’s social care and adult social care is essentially that adult social care gets cross-subsidised by private clients, as I said, and to some extent by its integration with the healthcare system. What does not really happen in children’s social care is the same level of integration or thought about how the education service integrates with it. In Somerset, we have very high transport costs for children who wish to be educated in Somerset but are placed outside it, for example in Bournemouth. That is something that we need to address.

The reality is that overall Somerset needs more funding. It needs fairer funding, because it is still massively underfunded relative to urban and other areas. On how
to pay for that, we have heard good points about why we should not automatically look to tax rises. Public spending has come in under estimate, so there is scope at the moment for a bit of extra deficit funding. Given the fiscal and monetary tightening around the rest of the world that is taking some of the heat out of western economies, I think that would not be frowned upon. Local government funding in Somerset would be a very worthy recipient of such flexibility.

9.13 pm

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Fysh). I concur at least with his points about local government funding and the pressures on councils in general with regard to their social care responsibilities. I want to address the points made in the joint Select Committee report. I thank the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston)—she is my hon. Friend on this occasion—for her contribution to the report. Everyone worked together on it.

I do not think there is any doubt at all that funding is needed for social care. We cannot carry on trying to get this problem fixed in the short term in an as-and-when basis. We need a long-term solution that people, and particularly the local councils that have to deliver the services, can rely on. Politicians are often good at identifying what needs to be done, but not very good at saying how it should be done. A great strength of the report is that I think it actually does say how this should be done. We say that we cannot carry on providing care in the same way and to the same level as has been the case over the past few years. We are saying that, yes, there is a gap here and now, as identified by the Local Government Association, the King’s Fund and the Nuffield Trust. There are clearly demographic issues that are pushing costs upwards with regard to not merely the elderly, but people of working age with disabilities—there are demographics in both. We also have to accept that if we broaden the scope of people who get care, including people who have moderate needs, that will mean prevention and taking people out of the national health service. That is one way in which we can join up the two services very effectively.

We then have to look at quality. We all know of examples of quality failing at present. We know that the workforce are often on zero-hours contracts and the minimum wage—the same wage someone working on a supermarket checkout can get. We need to look at the long-term stability of the workforce, as well as their pay and conditions. We need to consider the viability of care providers, which are often giving contracts back or going out of business. All those issues require money. That is why, in the end, I have to say that although I very much support the long-term principle of care that is free at the point of delivery, according to need—that is one way in which we can join up health and social care in the long term—all the issues that I listed immediately need extra funding. It will therefore perhaps be some time before we can move to that free care system, but we can deal with clinical needs much earlier.

We can ensure that any money that is raised, whether through the national insurance funding model or the German model, is earmarked so that people can see that if they have paid extra, it goes towards social care. That came out very strongly from the citizens’ assembly. That is one way in which we can join up the two services and taking people out of the national health service.

Integration is a really important issue. We have not started from scratch and called for a whole new national health and care system, which could take years to bring about. We have said that, yes, health and social care need integrating and bringing together, as do housing services—most people who get social care do so in their home—and the link with public health, but that can be done within existing frameworks locally. The integrated care plans have been mentioned as one basis and there are the health and wellbeing boards. We have also heard about the Manchester model. All those models already operate and we can use them to bring about this practical integration at the point at which people need the service. This is not about a new bureaucratic framework, but about delivering services better for the individual.

Yesterday I was pleased to go on a 10-mile walk, raising funds for the Sheffield Hospitals Charity—that perhaps says something in itself. I went with my excellent consultants, Professor John Snowden and Dr Andy Chantry, together with their team from the haematology department at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital in Sheffield, who have given me such excellent care and treatment over the last year. I thank them all very much for that. There is a little secret that I have to let out though: John Snowden and Andy Chantry did a 50-mile walk over two days, and I just came on the last 10 miles of it. The commitment that they showed with members of their team demonstrates and is symptomatic of the approach that so many of our NHS staff have to the job they have to do—a job that we rely on them so much for.

9.19 pm

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow the thoughtful speech of the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts). I really enjoyed listening to it.

Everybody has an NHS story, whether a child born, a disease cured or a life saved. I have seen the NHS at its best—when my five-year-old son got appendicitis on
Christmas day and three days later was home and happy, without his appendix. I have also seen it at its worst, however—when my fiercely independent grandmother tripped over and bruised herself. What followed included misdiagnosis, mis-medication, a morphine overdose, a six-month stay in hospital and enormous frustration trying to access social care. She returned home only to die. I suspect that my experiences reflect a national picture, of many, many lives saved against the odds and huge public support, rightly, for the NHS, but also of the tragedy of lives lost through omissions and errors.

I would like to take a step back in this the NHS’s 70th birthday year to say there is much to celebrate in our national health service: 44 million babies born, millions more treated, cancers cured, thousands of people alive who would not have been without its help, and long-term conditions such as diabetes much better managed, with much improved quality of life as well as life expectancy. Our health service is renowned around the world for providing the most equitable access to healthcare, and for this it is the envy of the world.

But we must not be misty-eyed about the NHS. Even on access, in my area of Kent there are some terrible A&E waits, while 1,500 children are waiting for mental health treatment, over 100 of them for more than a year. In some areas, NHS outcomes are not what they should or could be. There is still far to go to join up parts of the health and social care systems, as others have said this evening, and too little emphasis on public health and ever rising demand. I welcome the recently announced £20.5 billion of funding for the NHS, and also the forthcoming social care settlement, which is really important, because funding the NHS will not work if we do not also give social care the funding it needs.

The NHS has a huge opportunity to make the funding go further, and I do not mean through salami-slicing, penny-pinching and cost-cutting, through saving on biscuits and paper clips—I actually think a little more should be spent on enabling staff to eat together. I just want to touch on three areas of better spending. One is technology. There is a huge opportunity here. It has been said many times, but should be said again, that there is much further to go to improve the use of technology in the NHS, whether that is just updating systems so they work—so that doctors do not spend time cutting and pasting patients’ information or waiting for a system to turn on after it has turned itself off; having a fully functional single patient record that brings together mental and physical health, dental records and end-of-life instructions; or giving patients far more opportunity to use technology. In that regard, I welcome the recently announced app for booking appointments online. There are many other tools for better self-management. We must drive forward the potential for big data, artificial intelligence and personalised medicine, which could make such a difference to what we get from our NHS.

Secondly, on the workforce, it is fantastic that we are training and recruiting more doctors, including 100 more in a medical school in Kent, but with vacancy rates too high, particularly in mental health, and high staff turnover, we know that for parts of the country things are just not working. Junior doctors have told me they feel like cogs in a machine, and so too often do nurses, therapists, healthcare assistants, porters—you name it. So often I have heard them say things like, “Nobody ever listens”. In some parts of the health service, command and control has unfortunately dehumanised the experience of working in the NHS—a job that should be so full of satisfaction. The NHS has much to learn from itself, and from other systems and other sectors, about how to be a better place to work and to make the most of its fantastic workforce in order to provide the care we aspire to.

Thirdly, it is time to end the divide between physical and mental health. We need to give a greater share of the funding pie to mental health, as the Government have recognised, and knit together mental and physical health. When the two are joined together, it improves outcomes for patients and provides better value for the NHS—better outcomes at lower cost, which is exactly what we need and want.

We need to talk about the funding of the NHS and social care, as many Members have done so eloquently this evening. We need to talk about how much money is needed, and about the big question of where we are to find that money. Those are not difficult conversations, and they do not involve difficult decisions. However, we also need to talk about how to make the best use of the money, so that we can have the health and care system that we want for years to come.
independent living, and that can often lead to lonely living. There is a potential solution there, which might also solve some of the adult social care problems.

Is it time that we had a debate about a further loosening of planning law? Let me put some questions—not solutions—on the table. Are we allowing a degree of timidity in relation to development? Are we just trying to add little bits to existing conurbations, thus increasing pressure? Are we not thinking clearly enough about the building of completely new towns, with proper infrastructure—road, rail, health provision and schools—as part of the plan, rather than simply adding to the edges of existing communities?

Should we be trying to unlock brownfield sites? I can think of a perfect 5-acre derelict site that used to be the gasworks in the middle of Ramsgate. No one wants to develop it because of the remediation costs. Should legislation be introduced to force what are often utility companies to regenerate on pain of, perhaps, an additional business rate charge, or should the Government provide loans with a clawback provision to inject the seed capital to get developments moving?

We do have an existing stock, and I think that two measures would be helpful. Capital gains tax and inheritance tax are a problem, particularly for older people with holiday homes. Let us suppose that an elderly couple have had a holiday home for many years. One of them might become a widow or widower. They have fond memories, and do not want to rent out the property because of the aggravation that it would involve. Most people will not face an inheritance tax charge. Why on earth would they want to sell an asset that is hugely pregnant with gain, paying capital gains tax at 18% or 28%? They would rather leave it in their estate until they die, and perhaps pay nothing at all. As for those with a chargeable estate, why should they pay a 28% capital gains tax charge, and then a 40% inheritance tax charge on the £72 that is left in cash after that tax has been paid, which would represent a total tax charge of 57%?

The second measure I present is downsizing relief for stamp duty. Often, again, this would affect the elderly person, perhaps on becoming widowed. There is a north-south divide in this of course: in parts of the country it will be perfectly possible to buy that downsized smaller property for within the £125,000 stamp duty threshold for paying zero, but for many in the south, particularly in London, there will be a huge stamp duty to pay. My proposal is that we should have a downsizing relief for people moving to a smaller floor-area property—the threshold could perhaps be 75%. The Treasury might say it would lose money, but it forgets that for every seller there would be a new purchaser, so we would be creating stamp duty on purchases that might not otherwise have happened at all.

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that housing is also a key determinant of health and that is an additional aspect that we must think about, especially in housing for older people? We must see housing as part of that bigger picture in creating a healthy nation.

Craig Mackinlay: Older people often stay stuck in a house that is not right for their future needs and is further from help they would so desperately require in their later years.

To conclude, housing is a scarce resource, particularly in some parts of the country, and we must maximise its use and maximise mobility.

9.31 pm

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): As many Members have mentioned, we are approaching the 70th birthday of both the NHS and the social care system. I was shocked to work out that I graduated in the first half of that period, when the NHS was a youngster of only 34. That was a bit depressing; how did I get so old?

Most patients in all four UK health systems will have a very good experience, because they interact with dedicated and caring staff. But all four systems face three big challenges that we have talked about before: tight finances, workforce shortages and increasing demand. As others do, I welcome the £20 billion extra funding that will be there by 2023. Over the next five years, that equates to a 3.4% uplift each year. That is double the 1.2% that the NHS has been experiencing over the past eight years, but it is below the 3.7% that has been the average since 1948. So it is welcome, but to call it a windfall can make people complacent that the challenges within the NHS and social care have simply gone away.

I agree with the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) that it is very disappointing that this is again only NHS resources, with no money for public health, for training or for capital or maintenance and, most importantly, no funding for social care.Trying to fund a health system without supporting social care is like trying to fill a bath with the plug out.

The other question is of course: where is the money coming from? I am afraid that I am also in agreement with the hon. Lady that I do not see much chance of a Brexit dividend; I know that I am Irish, but I do not really believe that there is a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.

The Secretary of State for Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland have both mentioned that Scotland will get a £2 billion windfall through the Barnett consequential, and that would of course be hugely welcome, but in fact no detail has been sent back in response to the letter from our Finance Minister, and we will simply have to wait for the autumn statement, because the Barnett consequentials are not always as they appear. When NHS England got £337 million to prepare for winter pressures, naturally NHS Scotland was hoping for £32 million; in fact, by the time all the other cuts were applied to it, £8.4 million made it over the border.

The Scottish Government have increased health funding by 45% since coming to power in 2007, and despite an 8% cut in the Scottish budget since 2010, we still invest £163 a head more than is invested in people in England. We focus on things like quality improvement, and we have the first national patient safety programme. That has reduced costs and it has a massively reduced mortality. It also helps to avoid litigation, which is at a much lower level in NHS Scotland than here in England.

The next issue is the workforce. There is no extra funding for Health Education England, although it is expected to educate 1,500 more medical students and train 5,000 more GPs. Despite 36,000 nursing vacancies, the nursing bursary has been removed, and this House
voted to remove the postgraduate nursing bursary just last month, so it is difficult to see how we will tackle those challenges. Even before Brexit, we are losing EU staff.

In the NHS in England, 19% of its EU doctors are in the process of leaving. Unfortunately, Scotland is also seeing 14% of its EU doctors going. We have registered a drop of 90% in the number of EU nurses willing to come to work in the UK system, and we have had the issue involving more than 2,000 non-EU doctors being turned away and refused tier 2 visas in the first five months of this year. I welcome the fact that that situation has now changed, but this is about the message that that sent out. It is about the need to have an immigration policy that will deliver the people we require. Social care workers will be a particular issue, because they will not qualify for tier 2 visas. They will not be classed as highly skilled enough, and they will not earn enough.

A further challenge is increased demand. Public health has received no extra money, and it has already faced cuts. That has resulted in cuts to services such as smoking cessation and tackling addiction, inactivity and obesity. I called earlier for health in all policies, and tackling issues such as poverty and adverse childhood experiences is really important. They drive a huge amount of mental and physical ill health. We often blame increased demand on the ageing population, but I would point out, having graduated in 1982, that I worked in Victorian hospitals, on Nightingale wards, and I remember the first CT and MRI scans. Since then, we have modernised not all but many of our hospitals and increased the availability of technology and expensive new treatments. We are now entering the age of gene therapies, which will be incredibly expensive.

The chief medical officer in Scotland has formulated a policy called realistic medicine. It advises that, as doctors, we should not presume that every patient always wants the latest brand new treatment or to be put through an operation. We should not presume; we should just ask them what is important to them.

One of the things that is important for everyone is keeping their independence. I do not just believe in independence for Scotland; I believe in independence for older citizens. That involves not rationing hip, knee and eye operations, as is still happening here in England, but investing in them. If we delay people’s hip or knee operation, that increases the risk of falls. That will simply cost more in the long term. We are trying to get people operated on at an earlier stage, so that they can stay more independent. We should not presume; we should not assume that, as doctors, we should not presume that every patient always wants the latest brand new treatment or to be put through an operation. We should not presume; we should just ask them what is important to them.

The most important missing item in the statement on NHS funding was, as has been said, funding for social care. The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr Prisk)—I used to live there when I was a teenager—talked about providing free personal care. That is something that we do in Scotland. Someone in a care home there will pay accessibility costs, which are means-tested, but regardless of whether someone is in a care home or at home, we provide free personal care. That might seem more expensive, and indeed it is—we spend £113 a head more in Scotland than is spent here—but by comparison to being in hospital, it is incredibly cost-effective. Over the past five years, Scotland has seen just one third of the rise in A&E attendances and emergency admissions that has been seen in NHS England, and that is a cost that is worth getting back.

Members have talked about funding the service and the need to look at interesting ways to do so, and I agree that national insurance needs to be reconsidered. It used to be called national health insurance, but it of course covers many other things, such as benefits, pensions and so on. However, it is something to consider, because the threshold actually starts quite low when people are earning poorly and then starts to thin out when people are earning well. That does not seem fair. It is the same for retired people who have a generous pension and do not really go on paying national insurance. That cannot be right when they are entering the most important years.

In Scotland, we believe in integration, not competition. It is estimated that the healthcare market in England wastes £5 billion to £10 billion just in administration. The NHS in England faces reorganisation anyway as it moves through sustainability and transformation plans into accountable care organisations or systems or whatever they are to be called. Perhaps the Government should consider getting rid of section 75 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 that forces services to be put out to tender, resulting in outsourcing and fragmentation. England needs integration and co-operation, not financial competition. Tariffs that reward a hospital only for admitting someone instead of trying to keep them home are counterintuitive.

I agree that place-based planning is the best approach for reorganisation, but it must be centred on patients, not budgets. It must start with designing what is required for the long term, not at the bottom line and then working back. In this next reorganisation, the Government should be radical and get rid of the healthcare market and, as the NHS turns 70, think of moving to a unified, public national health service.

9.41 pm

Barbara Keeley (Worsley and Eccles South) (Lab): As hon. Members have said, today’s debate comes in the week of the national health service’s 70th birthday. It is fitting that we should celebrate the NHS, which is one of this country’s most cherished organisations, but this week also marks another less-celebrated 70th birthday: that of social care. It is only right that we recognise the vital role that social care plays in keeping people independent and in supporting them with daily activities. Many hon. Members focused on social care in their contributions, but it is in a worrying state of decline at a time when it has never been more needed.

The joint report by the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, which is chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts), described a system “under very great and unsustainable strain.”

The report found that the care system is not fit to respond to current needs, let alone to meet future needs. The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services said in its most recent budget survey earlier this month that the present situation “cannot go on”. The King’s
Fund says that progress is “desperately needed” and that the system needs an urgent injection of cash just to maintain things as they are.

The projected growth in demand for services from our ageing population, with its ever more complex care needs, is set to rise substantially. I ask the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) to look at the years of healthy life expectancy, which end in someone’s 50s or 60s in many deprived areas. At the current rate of spending, the system will face a funding gap of £2.2 billion to £2.5 billion by 2019-20, and as we have heard, grant funding from central Government to the budgets of councils that have a statutory responsibility for delivering care has been cut by around 40%. As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the budget has been cut by 60% in Liverpool.

As the Select Committees’ report notes, local authorities have also faced other cost pressures, such as the apprenticeship levy, increased national insurance contributions and the so-called national living wage, which has had the most significant impact. Cost and demand pressures on councils are growing, but ADASS reports that £7 billion has been cut from adult social care budgets since 2010. With the Government’s Green Paper now delayed until the autumn, a funding settlement for social care sadly does not seem imminent. According to ADASS, recent Government funding simply is not keeping pace with demand, and the result is that councils are plugging the gap in any way they can. Over half of local councils are unsustainably raiding council reserves, while others are making cuts elsewhere, so other important council services suffer. Local authorities, to their credit, are doing their best to protect budgets for adult social care services, but the increasing financial pressure on councils has meant that both the quality and the sufficiency of care have fallen and are anticipated to fall further.

Care providers’ dependency on dwindling local authority fee levels is leading to the care market becoming increasingly fragile and even failing in some parts of the country. A recent report from Age UK described the emergence of “care deserts” where care is wholly unavailable. Forty-eight directors of adult social services report that they have seen care providers closing or ceasing to trade in the past six months, 44 have had contracts handed back by homecare providers and 58 have seen care or nursing home closures, involving 2,000 people, with 135 care homes ceasing to trade in the past six months—this is from my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith)—which is more than five a week.

Care homes with predominantly council-funded placements are at most risk of failure. Indeed, some care providers are now rejecting local authority-funded placements because of that funding shortfall. Continued failures of that type would be disastrous for publicly funded care, because councils would have to find care placements with a shrinking pool of providers.

As we have heard, the most serious imminent threat to the viability of the care sector is the unresolved sleep-in care back pay crisis, which my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich referred to comprehensively. As she said, this issue has been going on for several years since a tribunal ruled that overnight care shifts should be paid at the national minimum wage, rather than at a flat rate. Care providers, mainly charities, are facing a six-year back pay bill, which many say they cannot afford without having to withdraw services or close altogether. In a recent survey, 70% of learning disability social care providers said that they would cease to be viable if they had to pay this bill. As hon. Members have said, this issue has been handled badly.

Having admitted that previous guidance to care providers had been misleading, Ministers seem to be continuing to ignore warnings that the combined liability of providers—some £400 million—could cause the collapse of parts of the care sector. Perhaps even worse, an estimated 100,000 personal budget holders will be liable to pay thousands of pounds in backdated pay. I join other hon. Members in saying that I hope the Care Minister will tell the House what plans are in place in the event that those care providers go to the wall and what help there will be for personal budget holders.

As we have heard, the Government seem to have no grasp of the urgency of this problem, which could derail the Transforming Care programme and could see large numbers of the most vulnerable people go without care services. Where people are able to get care, it is not always of the best quality. A fifth of care facilities have the worst Care Quality Commission rating. I am concerned that worrying pockets of poor quality are now emerging across both residential and home care, particularly in the north-west and the north-east, with nursing care among the worst affected.

I recently met a group of care staff from different parts of the country, and some of their stories of their current work experience are horrifying. Overworked, underpaid and undervalued care staff are under pressure as never before. Care providers are trying to meet increased demand for care with diminishing fee levels and are even reducing care packages to win procurement bids in the horribly named “reverse auctions.” That has led to staff with many years’ care experience being stuck on zero-hours contracts, with the constant threat of extra hours of work being withheld.

Staff are turning up to work ill because they are not paid sick leave or because they fear having their pay docked. Young apprentices are being left in responsible care positions for which they have no training or experience. Most troubling was to hear of lists showing staff on care rotas when they are actually on long-term sick leave or maternity leave, or rotas including managers and staff who do not provide care.

It is only the experience, dedication and devotion of care staff such as those I met that has stopped care quality sliding even further. The CQC has warned that the resilience of care staff is not inexhaustible. Under such pressure, with no training and little support, the recruitment and retention crisis will get worse.

We know that the impact of cuts to social care budgets is most keenly felt by people who need care and their families, and we know that 1.2 million older people who need social care have unmet care needs. People are not getting the help they need with the basic tasks of daily living, which is robbing them of their dignity. The fragility of the care system is also heaping great pressure on many unpaid carers who have to pick up the slack when formal care is unavailable. Carers are coming under unprecedented pressure, with little opportunity for respite, because most councils now have to charge for care breaks, as Labour research has shown. Four in 10 carers have not had a day off in a year, while one in four unpaid carers have not had a day off in five years.
That is taking a heavy toll on their health; almost three quarters of carers told Carers UK that they had suffered mental ill health as a result of caring, while well over half said their physical health had worsened.

Despite the great contribution that carers make to the economy, the Government’s recent carers “action plan”, published in place of a promised national carers strategy, sadly offered no financial commitments to increase support for carers or to increase carer’s allowance, which is still less than Jobseeker’s allowance. That is an insult to people whose care is estimated to be worth over £130 billion per year to the economy.

NHS sustainability depends on an effective and properly funded social care system. As we have heard in this debate, there was no money for social care in the Prime Minister’s recent NHS announcement. The announcement also excluded public health budgets, at a time when childhood obesity is reaching epidemic levels, and when there have been cuts to sexual health and addiction services. Just as with social care, underfunding those important preventive services is a false economy and will end up costing the NHS. There is now broad agreement that the need for investment in social care has never been more urgent and doing nothing is not an option, yet all we have from this Government is a proposed Green Paper, now delayed until the autumn, setting the timetable for dealing with the funding crisis in social care back even further.

I want to say in conclusion that that is not good enough. Social care needs funding now to ease the crisis and to stabilise the care sector. It is time this Government showed leadership and acted in the best interests of all the people across the country who need care.

9.51 pm  

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I would like to start by welcoming the recent joint report from the Health and Social Care Committee and the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on long-term social care funding. I am extremely grateful for their incredibly collaborative approach to working on this report, which captures a number of important voices on the subject of social care funding, not least the citizens assembly. The Government will of course respond to the report fully in due course. I agree that it is time to set political differences aside in addressing these issues, and we welcome the involvement of parliamentarians from across the House, as well as that of leaders, professionals and experts from the health and care sector, in doing so.

This has been a wide-ranging report, which has mainly been constructive and collaborative. In the time left to me, I will try to cover as many points as I can, but if I do not get to some of them, I will write to the Members concerned. The Government recognise that demands on our health and social care systems continue to grow, as people live longer than ever before, often with multiple complex conditions. For that reason, we have increased the funding available to the NHS in real terms every year since 2010 and given councils access to up to £9.4 billion more dedicated funding for social care over three years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) spoke about integration and how Torbay is a great shining beacon of integrated care. The Government also recognise that the health and social care systems are intimately linked, and we have set out our intention to pursue a major drive towards better integration in order to achieve person-centred, co-ordinated care. We are committed to increasing the NHS budget to ensure that patients can get the care they need in a financially sustainable system. Our NHS now has in real terms about £14 billion more to spend on caring for patients than it did in 2010-11. With our NHS funding at record levels, that means more patients are being treated, and more operations are being carried out than ever before, by more doctors and nurses; this represents more than 14,500 more doctors and almost 13,300 more nurses on our wards. But we recognise, as so many Members from across the House have said, that NHS and social care provision are two sides of the same coin.

The long-term funding report mentions the current state of the social care system, and it is important to be clear about what the Government have already done to support local authorities in England. We understand the pressures on the system, which is why at the spring Budget in 2017 we gave councils access to £2 billion more funding. We are committed to creating a sustainable system of social care in England, which is why, as a starting point, the Government gave councils access to £9.4 billion more dedicated funding for social care over three years.

So many Members have set out the importance of early intervention to manage the demand for crucial health services and improve people’s wellbeing. The 2015 spending review made available £16 billion of funding for local authorities in England for public health. That was in addition to the money that the NHS spends on prevention, including our world-leading screening and immunisation programmes and the world’s first national diabetes prevention programme. Our investment is making a real difference, including to social care services throughout the country, with a 39.6% reduction in delayed transfers of care attributable to adult social care between February 2017 and April 2018.

We are taking additional steps to ensure that those areas that face the greatest challenges improve services at the interface between social care and the NHS. That includes the establishment of a series of local system reviews led by the Care Quality Commission, to evaluate the boundary between health and social care’s functionality. It is absolutely right that future social care funding is agreed alongside the rest of the local government settlement at the forthcoming spending review. The settlement will of course apply to older and working-age adults as well.

We recognise that an ageing society means that we need to reach a longer-term sustainable settlement for social care. An ageing society puts pressure on local authority budgets, on providers and on local services, which is why the Government have committed to publishing a Green Paper to outline our proposals for change. We recognise that decisions on future reforms of the NHS and social care must be aligned, which is precisely what we will publish the Green Paper at the same time as the NHS plan, to ensure that the system is sustainable going forward.

As the hon. Member for Sheffield South East (Mr Betts) so eloquently said, a priority for reform is making sure that people are better able to plan ahead and protect themselves against the highest care costs. It is not fair that some people in our society currently stand to lose
the majority of the savings and wealth that they have built up over a lifetime. The Select Committees’ report highlights that issue powerfully.

Many Members spoke about the drive towards the integration of health and care services. The better care fund is our programme for joined-up health and care services, which will allow people to manage their own health and wellbeing and live independently in their communities for as long as possible. In 2015-16, some 90% of local area leaders said that the better care fund had already had a positive impact on integration locally. Nobody underestimates the pressures that local authorities and health providers are under, but working collaboratively, communicating better and avoiding duplication of effort is a good way to use resources.

In advance of the NHS’s 70th anniversary later this week, the Prime Minister announced her intention for the Government to work with the NHS to develop a 10-year plan for the future of the health service. Th is is underpinned by a five-year funding offer, which will see the NHS budget grow in real terms by more than £20 billion a year by 2023-24. That funding growth is significantly faster than for the economy as a whole and reinforces this Government’s commitment to the NHS as our top spending priority. Such intervention is possible only because of the difficult decisions that the Government took to get our nation’s finances back in order.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston) spoke about how we must be really honest about where the funding is coming from. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said that we will listen to views about how we will do that, and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will set out the detail in due course.

In return for the new investment, the Government will now ask NHS leaders to produce a new 10-year plan, led by clinicians and supported by local health and care systems throughout the country. The plan will set a vision for the health service, ensuring that every penny is well spent and focused on improving outcomes for patients. We welcome parliamentarians’ continued contributions to informing the debate across health and social care. I commend the estimates to the House.

9.58 pm

Dr Wollaston: I again thank all the staff who work in health and care, and the carers and volunteers who work as partners with our health and care service. I thank the Minister for her constructive response to the debate and colleagues from all parties for their contributions.

We are all looking forward to seeing the detail of the 10-year plan in November, and we look forward to that plan being worked up with those working in the service and those who represent patients, so that we get the very best from the funding we have. May I leave the Minister with some thoughts? I really hope that transformation funding will be ring-fenced. It is about not just the money that we put into social care but how we make sure that when we change the packages of care better to suit individuals, the transformation is there. We have seen how effective that is in areas such as Manchester. I hope that the Minister recognises that the workforce lies at the heart of everything that is delivered in health and social care. In thanking again the health and care workforce, in this 70th anniversary year, I ask the Minister to put them at the heart of everything that we do.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54(4)).

**Business without Debate**

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (4 JULY)**

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 4 July, business in the name of Ian Blackford shall be treated as being taken on an allotted half day provided under paragraph (2)(b) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business); notwithstanding paragraph (2)(c) of Standing Order No. 14, such business may be entered upon at any hour and may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours; proceedings shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(Mims Davies.)

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (5 JULY)**

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 5 July—

(1) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (4) of Standing Order No. 14 (Arrangement of public business), the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to the matter of the Principle of Proxy Voting shall have precedence over the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee; and proceedings on that Motion may continue until 2.30 pm and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and

(2) notwithstanding the provisions of paragraph (2)(c), as applied by paragraph (4), of Standing Order No. 14, the business determined by the Backbench Business Committee may then be entered upon.—(Mims Davies.)

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMITTEE**

Ordered,

That Stephanie Peacock be discharged from the International Trade Committee and Sir Mark Hendrick be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.)
Persistent Rough Sleeping in Nottingham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.— (Ms Davies.)

Mr Speaker: Colleagues are beating out of the Chamber. I am sure that the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) will not take it personally, and that there will be a respectful audience for her oration.

10.1 pm

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): May I begin by sending my best wishes to the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), and her husband? I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Selby and Ainsty (Nigel Adams), is supporting her at present, and I am sure that he will share the information from this debate with her when she returns.

According to homelessness charity St Mungo’s, the average age of death for a man who dies while homeless is 47; for a woman it is just 43. Rough sleeping is the most dangerous form of homelessness. It can be lonely, frightening and violent. For some, it is quite literally a death sentence. Holly Dagnall, Nottingham Community Housing Association’s director of homes and wellbeing, describes homelessness as a human emergency and who could disagree?

Until 2015, the snapshot figure of people sleeping rough in Nottingham was almost never in double figures, but the latest official estimate, in November last year, was of 43 rough sleepers. Six months on, that figure has not fallen. Nottingham is not an exception; the city ranks 56th of all local authorities for the rate of rough sleeping. Official figures recording a 169% rise in rough sleeping in England since 2010 will surprise no one. We have all seen the evidence of the growing crisis with our own eyes on the streets of Westminster and in many of our constituencies every night.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we have homelessness across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Does she agree that perhaps it is time for a dual strategy that addresses not only homelessness, but the issue of helping people to get employment? We have to give them vision, we have to give them hope and we have to give them a future. The Government need to look at both things together.

Lilian Greenwood: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that this is about providing people with not just a home, but the means by which they can sustain themselves in a home.

The reasons for the increased numbers are far from a mystery. Crisis cites the impact of welfare reform, rising rents and the housing crisis. People become homeless and sleep rough for many reasons, but the single biggest cause of statutory homelessness is now the end of assured shorthold tenancy. The cost of private rented accommodation has risen three times faster than earnings in England since 2010, and real earnings are still lagging behind 2008 levels a decade on.

Although I firmly believe that the Government bear a great deal of responsibility for the rise in homelessness and fear that their target of halving rough sleeping over the course of the Parliament and eliminating it altogether by 2027 lacks the urgency that the situation demands, I do very much welcome the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 and the Government’s decision to develop the national rough sleeping strategy. My reason for seeking tonight’s debate is to address the content of that strategy.

Concern about rising levels of rough sleeping in Nottingham was one of the drivers behind a new investigation commissioned jointly by Framework Housing Association and Opportunity Nottingham, the Big Lottery-funded programme supporting people with multiple needs. “No Way Out: A Study of Persistent Rough Sleeping in Nottingham” was produced by Dr Graham Bowpitt from Nottingham Trent University and Karan Kaur from Opportunity Nottingham, with help from Nottingham’s street outreach team.

The study sought to discover how far the recent increase in rough sleeping might have arisen “not just from more people coming on to the streets, but also from people remaining there longer or repeatedly”. It sought to identify “the characteristics that distinguish persistent rough sleepers from the wider street homeless population, and any common features in their circumstances that might help to explain persistence.”

In the remainder of my speech, I will focus on the study’s key findings before commenting on wider issues in Nottingham and at a national level.

For the purposes of the report, the definition of persistent rough sleeper is “someone who was recorded sleeping rough on at least 10% of nights between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2017, i.e. 36 nights (the ‘sustained’), or who has been seen sleeping rough in at least three out of the six years between 2012 and 2017 (the ‘recurrent’).” The report says:

“There were 72 persistent rough sleepers who met the above definition...7 who were both sustained and recurrent, 33 who were sustained and 32 who were recurrent. Of these...10 were women...and 62 men...58 were recorded as of White British ethnicity...most of the others being White (Other)...13 were recorded as having a disability (18%).”

According to the report, Opportunity Nottingham’s beneficiaries are recruited to the programme because they are assessed as having “at least three of the four prescribed complex needs: homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill-health and offending.”

Of the 72 persistent rough sleepers, 67—that is 93%—had problems with substance misuse. Some 49 were offenders or at risk of offending, and more than half had mental health problems.

Mr Chris Leslie (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): I commend my hon. Friend for securing the debate, and Opportunity Nottingham and NTU for producing the report. My hon. Friend mentioned that over half of those persistent rough sleepers had a mental health issue. Is it not hardly startling that there is a correlation with the reduction in the number of overnight mental health beds—not just nationwide, but specifically in Nottinghamshire? We have lost 176 mental health overnight beds since 2010, and that is one of the core drivers putting people back on to the streets.
Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is quite right to highlight the way in which cuts to our health service and other services are having an impact on the prevalence of rough sleeping.

Of the 38 Opportunity Nottingham beneficiaries, 32% had spent at least two weeks in prison since engaging with Opportunity Nottingham, 42% had experienced at least one eviction from accommodation, 42% had been excluded from a service because of unacceptable behaviour, and 24% reported begging as a source of income. In each case, those proportions are much higher than among the whole beneficiary cohort.

The study also identified common themes in the narratives provided by the street outreach team and Opportunity Nottingham personal development co-ordinators in relation to those persistently sleeping rough, stating:

“rough sleepers…and those who work with them are encountering a diminishing range of options when seeking to leave the streets, arising from cuts in public funding and adverse changes in the housing market. Hostels have closed, Housing Benefit availability is more restricted, affordable tenancies are more limited in terms of quality and quantity, and the supply of tenancy support has all but dried up.”

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend. Friend on the powerful case that she is making on behalf of our city. I served on the council in our city at a time when we virtually eradicated rough sleeping where we are today. Does my hon. Friend agree that this situation has been caused by a toxic combination of under-employment, poor housing supply, cuts to drug and alcohol services, inadequate mental health services and other eminently tackleable issues?

Lilian Greenwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. These issues were preventable and they are preventable. The last Labour Government did a great deal to tackle rough sleeping and it is very disappointing that we find ourselves where we are today.

Financial issues obviously loom large in the lives of many rough sleepers. This was found to be particularly true of migrants with no recourse to public funds, but many local rough sleepers also encountered restricted access to welfare benefits. The system can simply be too hard to negotiate, resulting in a preference for begging. Of course, that is an unreliable source of income, and it puts accommodation at risk, which is particularly relevant to the recurrent group.

The high proportion of persistent rough sleepers who have been in prison find that a lack of support on discharge frequently precipitates a return to a previous chaotic lifestyle. The operation of homelessness legislation itself can act as a barrier in some cases. For instance, rough sleepers fleeing from another locality, perhaps because of domestic violence, can be interpreted as having no local connection to Nottingham, while others vacating accommodation because of intimidation may be viewed as having become intentionally homeless.

The level of complex need generates particular problems, with many specialist facilities having been lost, as we have heard. As a result, many rough sleepers carry the baggage of past evictions and negative risk assessments, leaving them barred from many facilities and making them harder to accommodate. They often miss out on mental health or other assessments that might otherwise have opened up access to specialised support.

Ambivalent relationships with hostel accommodation are frequently mentioned, with stories of evictions for rent arrears or inappropriate behaviour, perhaps because of a lack of support. This is also seen in the impact of financial exploitation or financial ruin on homeless, resulting in many refusing offers out of fear or trying to avoid being lured into a lifestyle they wish to escape. Personal relationships may have a toxic effect on the lives of persistent rough sleepers. Women, in particular, can be trapped in exploitative and abusive relationships that impede solutions to their housing problems.

When those factors are combined, it can often create disillusionment with what is perceived as a hostile system, making the option to live on the streets attractive. Experiences of repeated failure, the sense of there being no alternative, and the effect of growing numbers of rough sleepers in generating a mutually supporting community can create an inertia in engaging rough sleepers to pursue better options.

While this was a limited study of rough sleeping in one locality, I hope that it will prompt the Minister to consider initiatives that are worthy of further research and experimentation. The report recognises how an ambivalent relationship with hostels can leave rough sleepers stranded, calling on the city council and other social housing providers to adopt schemes such as Housing First that bypass hostels and accommodate rough sleepers straight from the streets with appropriate support. Housing First is being piloted in Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool—places with a devolution deal. What resources exist to develop Housing First as part of the solution in areas with high levels of persistent rough sleeping where there is not a directly elected mayor?

The complexities of human relationships should be acknowledged when drawing up personalised housing plans. For example, requirements such as a local connection and intentionality rules should not be applied too harshly to people who have a genuine need to escape a damaging relationship. Couples in a valued relationship should be able to be accommodated together.

As has been said, mental health problems have been shown to feature prominently among Nottingham’s homeless population. The Care Act 2014 was introduced to make social care assessments more readily available, but there is evidence to suggest that homeless people struggle to access this provision. Some councils have taken the view that rough sleepers with poor mental health or alcohol and substance-related problems have no entitlement to a needs assessment under the Care Act because, it is said, their need for care or support is caused by “other circumstances factors” such as homelessness or rough sleeping rather than an underlying health condition. Can the Minister confirm that that interpretation of the Act, which has the effect of excluding rough sleepers from an entitlement that exists for the rest of the population, is incorrect? Will the Government issue guidance to clarify that people sleeping rough are entitled to a needs assessment under the Care Act on the same basis as everyone else? Does the Minister agree that when an individual who appears to have support or care needs presents to a local authority for assistance under the Homelessness Reduction Act, a referral should be made to the appropriate authority for a care needs
assessment, with the outcome of that assessment taken into account when developing any personalised housing plan?

The correlation between persistent rough sleeping and recent spells in prison reflects a failure in offender rehabilitation. That was supposed to have been remedied by the Offender Rehabilitation Act 2014, but there is evidence that despite the passing of this Act, short-term prisoners are still being discharged to no fixed abode. What measures will the Government take to ensure its programme up and running. The other £50 million was £100 million of capital funding to assist with the cost of a short-term temporary outcome, or will there be further measures that can be used to support long-term resettlement for persistent rough sleepers, particularly those with few options, they are a lifeline. What advice can only fund emergency measures, or if it can be used to support long-term resettlement for persistent rough sleepers who have no recourse to public funds? 

Homelessness is a human emergency, but ending it is not an impossible task. The Government say they have a target to reduce rough sleeping by half by 2022, and to eliminate it entirely by 2027. If they are not to fail, Ministers must ensure that their strategy addresses the needs of all rough sleepers, including those who are hardest to identify, reach, support and sustain.

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10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Nigel Adams): First, I would like to commend the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for securing such a worthwhile debate. I am sure the Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), will have heard her kind words.

Homelessness and rough sleeping is an issue that I am sure is close to all our hearts. It goes to the heart of who we are as a people and as a society. The Government recognise the challenges in Nottingham and across the country in tackling rough sleeping, and we are absolutely committed to tackling it. That commitment is enshrined in our manifesto pledge to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it altogether, more importantly, by 2027. The hon. Lady rightly mentioned the report by Dr Bowpitt and Karan Kaur about the persistent rough sleeping in Nottingham, and I know that our officials will have noted it with interest. I will certainly be following that up with officials with some form of response.

As many right hon. and hon. Members will be aware, we are doing a significant amount of work in this area, and we will be publishing the strategy shortly. First, if I may, I will outline some of the work we are doing in this area nationally, as well as what we have been doing in Nottingham, to tackle rough sleeping. This March, we announced our new rough sleeping initiative, which has been mentioned. It comprises tried and tested measures designed to bring down the levels of rough sleeping in the immediate term. A key part of this is the £30 million that the hon. Lady mentioned, which we have provided to the 83 local authorities that are the most challenged by rough sleeping. I know that the hon. Lady and other hon. Members from that fine city will welcome the fact that, as part of this fund, we have allocated it just over £420,000 from that fine city will welcome the fact that, as part of this fund, we have allocated it just over £420,000 from that fine city will welcome the fact that, as part of this fund, we have allocated it just over £420,000 from that fine city will welcome the fact that, as part of this fund, we have allocated it just over £420,000 from
experts from the sector, as well as from charities and local authorities. It is part of our initiative to ensure that our ambition comes to pass. Nationally, the rough sleeping initiative funding will allow local authorities to recruit over 500 new staff focused on the problem. Crucially, that will include more outreach workers to engage with people on the streets, specialist mental health and substance misuse workers—they have been mentioned—and dedicated co-ordinators to drive efforts to reduce rough sleeping in their areas.

Lilian Greenwood: I want to record that I did not include in my speech reference to a new service in Nottingham, Edwin House, set up by Framework and the Recovery Nottingham Network. It is specifically providing residential detox, but also residential care in a controlled environment for people with a record of substance misuse. Would the Minister like to come and visit the service, which has opened only very recently, to see for himself the work that is being done in Nottingham?

Nigel Adams: I certainly would—any excuse to go back to Nottingham. I remember going there very often as a child to visit family, and I would very much like to do so. I am sure my diary secretary will be scribbling down something to ensure that we get it in the diary in the near future.

This initiative will also provide over 1,700 new bed spaces, including in both emergency and settled accommodation. As I mentioned briefly, another key part of the initiative is the rough sleeping team that we have established. It comprises experts from local authorities across the country, Government agencies and charities. They will support this work and ensure that resources are applied effectively. They are continuing to work in partnership with staff in each area to support local authorities, voluntary sector partners and others to ensure this work delivers the real change we need.

We were delighted to announce recently that the rough sleeping initiative will be led by Jeremy Swain. I am sure the shadow Minister, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), is very aware that he brings with him 30 years of valuable in the sector, most recently as chief executive of Thames Reach.

While the initiative is focused on bringing down rough sleeping numbers this year, there is an existing project, now in its second year—the hon. Member for Nottingham South referred to it—which has focused on Nottingham and neighbouring local authorities. The £20 million rough sleeping grants, announced in December 2016, have seen 48 local authorities take forward bespoke projects that are relevant to their area’s needs. In Nottingham, the city council has received £371,000 to establish a rough sleeper prevention service. As we have heard, this includes the roll-out of “No second night out” beyond the city and multi-disciplinary outreach services, such as the provision of health support. This has helped support for more entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs. As hon. Members from the city know, the programme in Nottingham is now in its second year, and I am delighted to say that it supported more than 300 rough sleepers in the first year.

More broadly, to support local authorities to tackle homelessness and rough sleeping generally, we have committed £617 million in funding in the form of our flexible homelessness support grant. This ring-fenced fund gives local authorities more control and flexibility in managing local homelessness pressures. The hon. Lady will be encouraged to hear that, as part of that support grant allocation, Nottingham City Council has received £623,000.

As I have noted, tackling rough sleeping is a key priority not only for me, but for the Prime Minister and her Government. In order to meet our manifesto commitment to end rough sleeping for good, we are developing a cross-Government strategy that will make clear how we will achieve that. The development of the strategy is being overseen by a ministerial taskforce comprising relevant Ministers from across Whitehall. The taskforce is being support by a group of experts, in the form of our rough sleeping advisory panel. We are grateful to St Mungo’s for being part of the panel—I had the pleasure of speaking to its representatives this afternoon at the launch of its latest report. The strategy will set out the Government’s course of action for working with local authorities, the voluntary sector and the wider public sector to meet our aim of eliminating rough sleeping by 2027. We will be setting out further details shortly, but I can tell the House that our focus will be in three core areas—prevention, intervention and recovery—so that by 2027 nobody should have to sleep on our streets.

Before moving on to the other action that the Government are taking to tackle rough sleeping, I want to draw Members’ attention to the recent decrease in the number of people recorded as sleeping rough in London. Data from the combined homelessness and information network shows that there has been a decrease of more than 600 since last year. That is an encouraging sign, and we are committed to ensure that it continues, and at an increasing rate.

In pursuit of that objective, to support some of the most entrenched rough sleepers off our streets, we have announced three innovative Housing First pilots, to which the hon. Lady referred. The pilots will focus on around 1,000 of the most entrenched and persistent rough sleepers, making sure that they get the bespoke support and care they need to make a long-term recovery from their homelessness and rough sleeping. The £28 million fund that we have made available to support the pilots will provide individuals with stable, affordable accommodation and, importantly, intensive wrap-around support. That will hopefully help them recover from complex issues, such as substance abuse and mental health difficulties, and also sustain their tenancies so that they can stay in their homes. We expect the first people to move into the accommodation in the autumn, and I very much look forward to the positive impacts of the pilots being realised.

The hon. Lady asked about widening the Housing First programme. We will be analysing the results extremely carefully as soon as we get them. She asked whether there will be additional funding for the rough sleeping initiative after this year. We will announce the funding for 2019-20 shortly. She asked whether we will review the allocation of the Care Act 2014 in the strategy, and we will be looking at that—she made her arguments incredibly well, but I ask her to be a little patient. She also asked about the causes of homelessness and rough sleeping. We are certainly doing lots of work across Departments to ensure that we understand the causes fully. We will be commissioning a feasibility study to
determine how we can carry out robust and useful research in that regard. She asked what we are doing about migration, with regard to people who are not entitled to benefits. The controlling migration fund provides local authorities with funding for projects to tackle rough sleeping by non-UK nationals, and funded projects are working with non-UK national rough sleepers in a range of ways, including supporting them to secure regular employment and accommodation, or facilitating a voluntary return to their country of origin.

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which came into force in April, will fundamentally transform homelessness service delivery. I have seen some fantastic results in the borough of Southwark, where the provisions have been implemented for over 18 months. We are working closely with local authorities to examine the data on this, and we will be supporting them to implement the Act.

I thank the hon. Lady once again for bringing this worthwhile debate to the House. I hope that I have gone some way towards assuring her, and other Members representing Nottingham constituencies, that the Government are absolutely committed to tackling rough sleeping, and not just in Nottingham South but across the country.

Question put and agreed to.

10.30 pm

House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—
Leaving the Customs Union: Scotland

1. **John McNally** (Falkirk) (SNP): What recent assessment he has made of the financial implications for Scotland of the UK leaving the EU customs union.

**Elizabeth Truss**: Given that the Chancellor has so far failed to stop the Prime Minister’s hard Brexit, what are we to expect from him at Friday’s Cabinet showdown—action or evasion?

**John McNally**: Alexander Dennis is a strong, world-leading bus-building company employing 1,000 people in my constituency, but its chief executive officer, Colin Robertson, has expressed serious concerns about a hike in costs within the supply chain should the UK leave the customs union. Given that the Chancellor has so far failed to stop the Prime Minister’s hard Brexit, what are we to expect from him at Friday’s Cabinet showdown on Brexit—action or evasion?

**Elizabeth Truss**: Of course we want trade with the EU to be as frictionless as possible, but I point out to the hon. Gentleman that the UK market is worth £46 billion to the Scottish economy, and his party wants to leave that market.

**Stephen Kerr** (Stirling) (Con): Given that Scottish businesses export more to non-EU countries than to EU countries, does my right hon. Friend agree that the opportunity for Scottish businesses from new trade deals is potentially that much greater?

**Elizabeth Truss**: My hon. Friend is right. Outside the UK, the No. 1 destination for Scottish exports is the US, which accounts for 16% of exports, and of course part of the opportunity of leaving the EU is the ability to negotiate new trade deals, such as with the US.

**Mr Chris Leslie** (Nottingham East) (Lab/Co-op): It is getting completely ridiculous now. When either the Chancellor or the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is finally allowed to have a look at this mythical third customs plan from No. 10, will they at least have the integrity and honesty if it does not deliver the exact same benefits for Scotland—or, for that matter, England, Wales and Northern Ireland—to come to this House and actually say so?

**Elizabeth Truss**: As I have said, we want to secure as frictionless trade as possible with the EU as well as those opportunities with the rest of the world. It would be helpful if the Labour party, rather than trying to reverse the result of the referendum, was instead more positive about the opportunities in the future.

**Andrew Bridgen** (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend welcome with me the news that foreign direct investment project numbers are up 7% in Scotland compared to last year and have broken records every year for the past three years, and all this despite a Scottish National party Government in Scotland who are constantly talking down the prospects of the Scottish economy?

**Elizabeth Truss**: Those are fantastic figures for Scotland. We have seen good figures across the UK and the lowest unemployment for 40 years. The Labour party wants to overthrow capitalism; we want great businesses that will do well for our economy.

**Owen Smith** (Pontypridd) (Lab): Could the Chief Secretary to the Treasury reassure the House and the people of Scotland that they will not be paying more in fuel and alcohol duty after Brexit in order to fill the post-Brexit hole in our public finances?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I am afraid to tell the House that the people of Scotland are having to pay more income tax thanks to the SNP Government. Everyone earning more than £26,000 is paying more tax under the SNP.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Ind): Would the Chief Secretary to the Treasury not agree that the people of Scotland and the United Kingdom will be better off if we leave the customs union and invest in state-of-the-art technology to ensure that we have frictionless trade and pursue the trade opportunities that lie ahead of this nation around the globe?

**Elizabeth Truss**: I know that my hon. Friend has done a lot of work at the port of Dover making sure it is ready for all eventualities. We want to have the best possible trade with both the EU and the rest of the world. That is the opportunity we have got.

22. [906212] **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Financial Times is reporting that both Ministers and Bank of England officials fear a Brexit assault on the £8 trillion asset management industry, so the stakes at this Friday’s Brexit Cabinet sunfight could not be higher. Will protection of Scottish financial passporting rights be a red line for the Chancellor?

**Elizabeth Truss**: The financial services industry is a very important industry for the whole UK and we want it to do as well as possible, which is why we are working
on getting the best possible deal. It is in the interests of EU countries that rely heavily on UK financial services to get a deal that suits both sides.

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): According to EY’s recently released Brexit Tracker, a third of all financial services companies have confirmed that they will move staff or operations outside the United Kingdom. Most are going to Dublin, Frankfurt and Luxembourg, and they are going because this Government cannot give them the basic assurances for which they, and we, have been asking for 18 months. After eight failed years of Conservative government, we simply cannot afford this. What are the Government going to do to stop it getting any worse?

Elizabeth Truss: I am amazed that the hon. Gentleman did not mention the fact that the City has yet again been rated the top financial centre in the world. We hear nothing but doom and gloom from the Labour party about the future of our economy. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the solution to our problems is calling business the enemy and overthrowing capitalism, he is seriously mistaken.

Unemployment Levels

2. Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): What fiscal steps his Department is taking to reduce unemployment. [906190]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): As a result of tough decisions made by Conservative-led Governments, the UK’s fiscal position has improved enormously since 2010. Contrary to the consistent predictions of doom-mongers on the Opposition Benches, during that process UK employment has also grown consistently. It now stands at record levels, and the unemployment rate is at its lowest in 40 years. However, we are further supporting job growth through the lowest corporation tax rate in the G20, and reduced employment costs through the employment allowance.

My right hon. Friend will know that our track record stands in stark contrast to that of Labour. No Labour Government have ever left office with unemployment lower than when they entered it.

Mrs Miller: The Chancellor is right. Record numbers of women are in work in this country, but I would like to see more of those women in better-paid jobs. Does the Chancellor support the Prime Minister’s view that the continuing commitment by business to invest in the UK economy, and that is what the Government are committed to doing.

Mr Hammond: Business investment in the UK over the last eight years has recovered significantly since the financial crisis, but right now, as my right hon. Friend knows, there is a degree of uncertainty. We need to get through this period of uncertainty in order to see a continuing commitment by business to invest in the UK economy, and that is what the Government are committed to doing.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne) (Lab): The Chancellor says that we need to deal with bogus self-employment, and I absolutely agree. One in 10 workers in the north-east are on zero-hours contracts, in temporary roles, or in low-paid and often bogus self-employment. What will the Chancellor do to ensure that these new jobs are genuinely sustainable roles, and that people are not leading their lives in insecure work without real employment rights?

Mr Hammond: The overwhelming majority of the over 1,000 new jobs a day that have been created since the 2010 general election have been conventional jobs; only a tiny fraction of people in the workforce are on zero-hours contracts—less than 2.8%. Zero-hour contracts do have a role to play, but the Government have taken action to make sure they are not abused, and we will continue to take action to make sure that the flexibilities that are essential to the operation of our labour market and the attraction of the UK for international investment are not abused.

16. [906205] Sir David Evenett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): Given that we are a Government and a party that strongly supports business and entrepreneurs, what estimate has my right hon. Friend made of business investment in the UK during the last eight years?

Mr Hammond: The hon. Lady is right on both counts. Self-employment is an important contributor to our economy and genuine self-employment is very much to be encouraged, but there is a problem of bogus self-employment. People who are essentially employed are not paying the proper taxes and operating according to the proper rules for people who are employed, and in some cases employers are concealing the employment of people for their own selfish reasons. We need to deal with both those counts.
EU markets to advise clients. Does my right hon. Friend agree that their views should be treated with respect and seriousness?

Mr Hammond: Yes, the views of business, which is the great generator of employment, wealth and prosperity in our country, should always be taken very carefully into account. We should listen to what business is telling us and make sure that we deliver a Brexit that delivers on the needs of business.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): The Chancellor lauds both the employment rate and the fiscal steps the Government he has been a part of have taken, but that data masks a host of problems, so can he confirm to the House today that he thinks a rising child poverty rate is a price worth paying for his spin and rhetoric?

Mr Hammond: No, and I should tell the hon. Lady that the proportion of people in absolute poverty is at a record low. Since 2010 there are 1 million fewer people in absolute low income; there are 300,000 fewer children in absolute low income and 200,000 fewer pensioners in absolute low income, and 881,000 fewer workless households. That is a great result and a great record, and we are proud of it.

Tax Regime: Forestry Sector

3. Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of the tax regime on the ability of the forestry sector to deliver value for money.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): The evidence from the Forestry Commission is that UK timber production is globally competitive. Our 25 year environment plan sees the Government committed to increasing timber supplies and to the greater use of home-grown timber within the UK construction sector.

Rebecca Pow: I fully support this Government’s ambition to plant more trees, but do the Minister and the Chancellor agree that any tax incentives towards this endevour should include a requirement not only to own woodland, but to manage it as well, so that we have the right amount of timber to fuel the timber industry? Will the Minister agree to meet me to discuss this?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that forestry ownership and the management of woodland is extremely important. We keep all taxes under review—including some of the distortionary effects that taxes may have that I know she might be concerned about—and I am delighted to confirm that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is looking forward to meeting her shortly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for that response. With the UK having an internationally competitive timber processing industry and having produced timber products with an annual value of £10 billion, will the Minister outline how his Department intends to facilitate a smoother tax path to ensure that smaller businesses in this big industry get help and support?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman raises a specific issue around the participation of smaller businesses in this industry, and we will be looking at that as we look at taxation in this area going forward. If he would like to make any specific representations to myself or the Chancellor, I am sure we would be delighted to receive them.

First-time House Buyers

4. Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): What steps he is taking to support first-time house buyers throughout the country.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): The Government have helped more than 300,000 first-time buyers to buy a home through our Help to Buy scheme, which includes the help to buy ISA, the help to buy equity loan and now the lifetime ISA. At the autumn budget I went further by abolishing stamp duty land tax for first-time buyers on property up to £300,000. Over 69,000 first-time buyers have already benefited from this change and we expect to help over 1 million first-time buyers over five years—and I remind my right hon. Friend that the Labour party voted against that measure.

Damian Green: Many younger homeowners will I am sure be delighted that the Government have cut stamp duty for 95% of first-time buyers. Can the Chancellor say how the rate of creating first-time buyers compares with previous periods, as keeping alive the dream of home ownership for many is essential for the long-term health of our society?

Mr Hammond: I can tell my right hon. Friend that under the last Labour Government, the number of people achieving home ownership fell by 61%. I think Labour’s position is clear. The Leader of the Opposition has described home ownership as a national obsession; for the Government it is a national priority. We are helping hundreds of thousands of people across the country to achieve the dream of owning their own home, and that is why I am proud that, under a Conservative Government, the number of first-time buyers is now at an 11-year high.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Will the Chancellor tell us what is being done for people who cannot afford their own home, in terms of lifting the borrowing requirement on councils so that they can build more social homes?

Mr Hammond: We have a £9 billion affordable homes programme, and we announced a £2 billion uplift in that programme last autumn. We have increased additional flexibilities to allow building for social rent and to relax the housing revenue account caps on local authorities in the highest demand areas. This Government’s programme to deliver the homes this country needs achieved 217,000 net additional dwellings last year and is on track to deliver 300,000 net additional dwellings a year by the middle of the 2020s.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): It is indeed commendable that the policies the Chancellor has brought to the House and made into law have been of enormous benefit to my constituents. Will he intensify his efforts in helping not only first-time buyers but those who find it difficult to afford houses? Can he perhaps say a few words on what he might do for them?
Mr Hammond: The key to dealing with the challenge that my hon. Friend outlines is to ensure improvements in the supply of housing. We have a consultation under way on the national planning policy framework, which will get more houses built, and we have measures to support demand by making Help to Buy equity loans available to those who are seeking to enter the housing market. This Government will remain committed to increasing the supply and to supporting those who need help, in order to make effective demand in this market.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Help to Buy scheme helps homeowners, but it also appears to be helping the shareholders, chairmen and chief executives of major building firms. Will the Chancellor take this opportunity to condemn the £500 million bonus paid to the chairman of Persimmon Homes and his staff?

Mr Hammond: Our objective is to increase supply, not to increase the profits of house builders. To do that, we need to ensure that the planning system can be responsive to the demand that we are creating by supporting people with measures such as Help to Buy equity loans, and that is what we intend to do through the national planning policy framework changes.

Leaving the EU: Agricultural Sector

5. Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): What assessment has his Department made of the fiscal effect on the agricultural sector of the UK leaving the EU customs union and single market.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): We are of course in the process of our negotiations with the European Union, and until they are concluded it will not be possible precisely to assess the impact on our agricultural sector, other than to assure the hon. Lady that agriculture has a very high priority for this Government. That is why we have pledged the same cash total in funds for farming as under the EU until the end of this Parliament.

Angela Smith: The Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that Brexit will deliver significant damage to the economy and to Government receipts. In that context, will the Minister guarantee that farmers will not suffer a reduction in the level of support they currently receive in the post common agricultural policy period?

Mel Stride: As the hon. Lady knows, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is consulting currently and looking at the results of the recent consultation on how we should fund farming. Public money for public goods is at the centre of that approach. I reiterate that we have pledged the same cash total in funds for farming as under the EU for the rest of this Parliament.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the agricultural sector is facing severe seasonal labour shortages, whose significant financial consequences are already being felt? Will he work with his ministerial colleagues to reintroduce the seasonal agricultural workers scheme, which has worked so successfully in the past?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend raises a very important point of which the Government are of course acutely aware. We are working with DEFRA to examine the issue.

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): After seeing the collapse in motor industry investment, does the Minister now accept that the Government must heed the call of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders to rethink their Brexit negotiating position and to support a customs union with the European Union after Brexit?

Mr Speaker: This is really about agriculture rather than about cars. The concept of an agricultural vehicle might come in handy to the hon. Lady in this context. I am sure that she meant to mention it—[Interruption.] Yes, I keep hearing about tractors from a sedentary position.

Mel Stride: To be fair, Mr Speaker, farmers do own cars, which is an important point to take into account. I assure the hon. Lady that this Government’s overriding objective is of course to negotiate an arrangement with the EU in which borders are as frictionless as possible, trade is kept flowing, supply chains are looked after and the agricultural and motoring sectors are supported.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Due to the UK’s massive EU contributions, support to EU farmers will be cut as the UK leaves the EU. Does the Minister agree that the commitment to make payments to UK farmers until 2022 demonstrates this Government’s support for UK farmers?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is entirely right. The commitments of support that we have already made up until 2022—the end of this Parliament—are entirely indicative of the importance of the agricultural sector to our economy.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Given that over 18% of Scotland’s international exports are food and drink related—our top export—this is an important question for people in Scotland. The EU’s average applied most-favoured-nation tariff for agricultural products is 11.1%, but it is different for individual products: 170% on oils, 157% on fruit and veg, and 152% on beverages and tobacco. How many agricultural jobs does the Treasury believe will be lost as a result of crashing out of the customs union without a trade deal?

Mel Stride: An objective of our negotiation is to ensure that we lower tariff barriers between ourselves and the EU27, as they will be known. The hon. Lady did not mention the tariff on whisky, which is currently 0%, and if we had an independent Scotland, she would be asking the same question in the context of the new border between ourselves and Scotland.

Kirsty Blackman: People in Scotland are used to the UK Government making empty assurances, but the reality is that farmers cannot make plans on the strength of such assurances. Scottish farmers should have received over 80% of the convergence uplift moneys that the UK was given by the EU, but the UK Government have slashed that, passing only 16% on to Scottish farmers. Given the UK Government’s track record, how can farmers trust them to deliver?
Mel Stride: I repeat to the hon. Lady that we have already shown, through the actions that we have taken, the reassurances that we have given and the consultations that we have undertaken, that agriculture is a firm priority for this Government, and that will continue to be the case in the negotiations and going forwards.

Infrastructure Investment: Oxfordshire

6. Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): What steps he is taking to invest in infrastructure in (a) Witney and (b) Oxfordshire. [906194]

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): Under this Government, investment in infrastructure will reach the highest sustained levels since the 1970s. In respect of Oxfordshire, the Department for Transport and Chiltern Railways have jointly funded a £400 million western section, delivering a new service between Oxford and London Marylebone, and we are of course backing the new Expressway and the east-west railway linking Oxford to Cambridge.

Robert Courts: I am grateful for the Minister’s answer, but congestion on the A40 and reliability problems on the Cotswold line make travel a daily challenge for residents of west Oxfordshire. We urgently need upgrades on that line and extra capacity on the road network, particularly the A40. What can Ministers offer through central Government funding to give hope to my constituents?

Robert Jenrick: I appreciate that my hon. Friend has been campaigning for such things since before his election. We have provided £35 million for the Oxford Science Transit scheme, which will enhance the A40 between Oxford and Witney. As for the A40 more generally, the Government are providing £150 million through the Oxfordshire housing deal, which he could tap into to see further improvements on that road.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC) rose—

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: Carmarthen East and Dinefwr and Dudley have much to commend them, but they are both a long way away from Oxfordshire, upon which this question is focused. The hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) has always erred on the side of optimism in the 30 years that I have known him. He should keep trying, but later on. Resume your seat, man. Jolly well done.

Ian Austin: It is a question about Oxfordshire.

Mr Speaker: I do not know what the hon. Gentleman knows about Oxfordshire, but we will hear from the fella later. We look forward to it. A sense of anticipation is developing in the House.

Local Government Funding

7. Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on changes in the level of funding for local government since 2010. [906195]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): It is right that money that is spent locally is raised locally. In 2010, councils were 100% dependent on central Government grants; by 2020, the vast majority of money spent locally will be raised by local councils.

Afzal Khan: The County Councils Network warned this week that “the worst is yet to come” for local government and that several authorities risk going bust. A survey of its members revealed that two thirds will struggle to balance their budget by 2021 unless more funding is made available, estimating the funding gap at £3.2 billion over the next two years. Is the Chancellor aware of the effect his austerity agenda is having on local services? Will he take responsibility for ending this crisis in our local councils?

Elizabeth Truss: As I said, we have moved from a situation in which local councils were majority funded by central Government to one where local councils are accountable for the money they spend and raise locally. We have given councils the extra ability to raise funds. I note that many councils have reinvented themselves, are doing things differently and are saving money, and public satisfaction with local services has held up.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council.

By when do the Government expect to publish the conclusions to their fair funding review of local government?

Elizabeth Truss: We are currently considering those responses carefully, and we will publish them shortly.

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): Eight failed years of austerity have meant poor levels of funding for local government. In fact, today the Local Government Association reports that, by 2020, councils will have had £16 billion of funding cuts. With low pay, woeful productivity; tenuous job security; stubborn inflation; rising national debt; a huge deficit; a sinking pound; creaking public services; decaying infrastructure and chaotic railways; what other wheezes does the Chief Secretary have up her sleeve to wreck the economy further?

Elizabeth Truss: We are building. We saw a record number of new businesses started last year. We have record levels of employment across our economy. We have brilliant Conservative Mayors, like Andy Street and Ben Houchen, who are attracting new businesses to their areas and redesigning their port infrastructure, whereas Labour councils across the country are doing things like closing down Airbnb, trying to stop Uber and trying to stop progress.

Peter Dowd: Yes, that told me. It gets worse, if that were possible. This year, business investment growth is slowing, annual export growth is slowing, service sector growth is slowing and economic growth is slowing. With Brexit looming and punch-ups in the Cabinet, should the nation’s economic future really rest in the hands of a go-slow Government?
Elizabeth Truss: Given that the hon. Gentleman’s stated policy is to have a run on the banks, I suggest that our ideas for bringing in business investment are doing a lot better for Britain.

Public Health Funding

8. Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on changes in the level of funding for public health since 2010.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about funding for public health. We fully understand the need to continue supporting prevention and public health in order to manage pressures on the NHS, and we will be setting out budgets for the public health grant in the forthcoming spending review.

Liz Twist: Gateshead Council will see a 15% reduction—that is £2.3 million—in its public health grant between 2013 and 2019-20, yet the recent NHS funding statement does not cover public health. With healthy life expectancy 13.8 years lower for men and 12.8 years lower for women in Gateshead than in many other areas, would it not make sense to invest in increased funding for public health services now to reduce demand on acute NHS services in the future?

Mr Hammond: The recent announcement of an additional £20 billion a year by 2023-24 for NHS funding was about core NHS funding. That is a huge commitment: £83 billion over the next five years. However, the hon. Lady is of course right to say that public health spending is also very important and has a direct impact on the way the NHS operates. Local authorities will receive more than £9 billion to spend on public health between now and 2021, but that is not the only stream of funding for public health. NHS England and the Department of Health and Social Care pay for Public Health England and for immunisation, screening and other preventive programmes. The NHS 10-year plan, which is currently under development, will set out proposals for public health.

Mr Speaker: We thank the Chancellor for his views, which have been set out in considerable detail. The right hon. Gentleman cannot be accused of excluding any consideration that might, at any time, to any degree, be judged material.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Last year, NHS England was given £337 million to prepare for winter pressures, but the Scottish Government received only £8.4 million rather than the expected £32 million. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has claimed that Scotland will get £2 billion from this recent uplift. When will we know the real figure?

Mr Hammond: I can give it to the hon. Lady now, with a brevity you will be proud of, Mr Speaker. It is £2.27 billion in 2023-24.

UK Battery Storage Market

9. Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the effect of the tax regime for onsite battery storage on the development of the UK battery storage market.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The Government have a number of policies in place to support the development of low-carbon technology, including battery storage technologies. Those include the carbon price support mechanism, which encourages decarbonisation of the power sector; the Government’s smart systems and flexibility plan; and the Faraday challenge fund.

Sir Henry Bellingham: I am very grateful to the Minister for that reply. Is he aware of the huge investment in the offshore wind sector along the Norfolk and Lincolnshire coast, where more than 1,000 individual turbines are in place, with the prospect of many more to come? The key breakthrough that is required is enhanced battery storage technology, which will enable wind-generated electricity to be put through the grid on days when the wind is not blowing. What more is he going to do to try to incentivise further breakthroughs on that?

John Glen: I am grateful for that question. My hon. Friend is correct; we are maintaining our position as a global leader in offshore wind. But the combination of that with support for the battery storage sector is important, and we will be supporting it through the capacity market, which is helping to bring down costs.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): As the Minister will be aware, Jaguar Land Rover is in my constituency and it is developing batteries. What discussions has he had with Jaguar Land Rover about tax incentives in that area?

John Glen: I have not personally had any such discussions, but the Exchequer Secretary will have done. We are supporting that business, and many others up and down the country, through the comprehensive industrial strategy that we are rolling out in different sectors.

Schools: Per Pupil Funding

10. Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Education on changes in the level of funding per pupil in schools since 2010.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): We have protected schools’ budgets in real terms since 2010, and through our reforms to schools and the curriculum children’s results have improved, particularly in reading.

Ruth Cadbury: Will the Minister confirm that the additional £1.3 billion announced a year ago does not address the £1.5 billion shortfall in school budgets? So what advice does she have for the 88% of schools in this country facing real-terms budget cuts, despite the new funding formula?

Elizabeth Truss: I suggest the hon. Lady reads last week’s edition of Schools Week, which said that the unions had admitted that they had their sums wrong and in fact per-pupil funding was being protected in real terms in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Will the Chief Secretary confirm that per-pupil spending in this country is higher than that in Japan or Germany? Will she also...
confirm that this is not just about how much we spend, but about how wisely we spend it, thanks to which 2 million more children are now in good and outstanding schools than there were in 2010?

Elizabeth Truss: My hon. Friend is correct. In addition, the real-terms funding per pupil will be 50% higher in 2020 than it was in 2000. This Government’s reforms to reading and mathematics are resulting in students’ scores increasing, whereas under the Labour party we just had grade inflation.

18. [906207] Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): That is fascinating, because compared with last year, England’s schools have 137,000 more pupils but almost 5,500 fewer teachers, 2,800 fewer teaching assistants, 1,400 fewer support staff and 1,200 fewer auxiliary staff. What has gone wrong? Is it that headteachers are not investing in staff, or is it that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is in denial and thinks that she knows more than they do about how to manage school budgets?

Elizabeth Truss: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that 10,000 more teachers are now working in our schools than under the Labour Government. He should look at the results that children are achieving and the improvements that we have seen, particularly in reading. Under Labour, we were among the worst in Europe, whereas we are now among the best.

Infrastrucure Investment: South-west

11. Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What steps he is taking to invest in infrastructure in Cornwall and the south-west.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): The Government are investing in the infrastructure of the south-west. We are investing £2 billion in the strategic road network, including to transform the A303/A30/A358 into an expressway. We are delivering £146 million of investment in Cornish rail and, thanks to my hon. Friend, we are delivering a portion of a £200 million fund for full fibre, and including £92 million to tackle congestion in the south-west?

Steve Double: Cornish wages continue to lag around 30% below the national average. The national productivity investment fund is designed specifically to increase wages and living standards; will my hon. Friend tell the House how much of that fund is being spent in Cornwall and the south-west?

Robert Jenrick: We are investing significant funds, including £92 million to tackle congestion in the south-west and a portion of a £200 million fund for full fibre, and we are providing £40 million for small and medium-sized enterprises through the British Business Bank, which will go to Cornish small businesses.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op) rose—

Mr Speaker: There is a lot to be said for the London Borough of Harrow—I used to live near it myself—but it is a considerable distance from Cornwall. We will get to the hon. Gentleman in at a later point in our proceedings.

HMRC: Office Closures

12. Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): What steps he is taking with HMRC to ensure that staff at its offices that are due to close are able to secure employment at HMRC regional hubs.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): HMRC’s analysis shows that 90% of those personnel in place as at 2015 will be able to move to a new HMRC location or see out their career in their current workplace. We will support those who have the skills necessary for the new workplaces, or, indeed, those who can aspire to those skills, to achieve that and provide jobs accordingly.

Imran Hussain: I thank the Financial Secretary for his answer, but although those employed in the soon-to-be-closed centres will still have a job, which we welcome, the relocation of the HMRC offices will leave a large gap in future employment opportunities in Bradford. What opportunities, particularly civil service opportunities, are being offered to the people of Bradford, bearing in mind the over-saturation of public sector jobs in Leeds?

Mel Stride: As Departments right across Government do, we look at the opportunities available in various towns and cities up and down the country, including Bradford. The hon. Gentleman mentions the employment impact of this particular measure; I remind him that the employment rate in Bradford is up 6.4% since 2010. That is above the national average and is a direct consequence of this Government’s policies.

21. [906211] Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The Financial Secretary to the Treasury, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister all gave commitments from the Dispatch Box that a meeting between senior HMRC officials and members of the Roadchef Employees Benefit Trust would bring a resolution to that dispute, but that did not happen, because HMRC stonewalled the EBT members. Will the Chancellor or the Financial Secretary commit to becoming a mediator in this dispute and bring a resolution that will see a pay-out finally being made for those beneficiaries?

Mel Stride: I slightly detected from the hon. Gentleman’s question the suggestion that that meeting between HMRC and the EBT did not take place, and it most certainly did. He and I have discussed this matter, both formally in a meeting and informally, and we have debated it in the House. I have always stressed that there is a dividing line between HMRC and Treasury Ministers: we cannot intervene in the tax affairs of individuals or organisations. I am confident that HMRC is progressing in an appropriate manner.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): Eight years of economic failure from this Government have been exacerbated—[Interruption.] I suggest that it is economic failure, with productivity growth down, GDP growth down and investment growth down, and in comparison with our comparators. Economic failure: if it smells like it and looks like it, that is what it is. Let me finish my question. That failure has been exacerbated by the Government’s reorganisation of HMRC, with cuts in our country deeper than in any other, outside Greece. Will they abandon this failing reorganisation,
which also means that there will not be a single customs hub anywhere along the south coast or north of the central belt?

Mel Stride: The simple fact is that we need an HMRC that is fit for the 21st century, for the new digital ways in which we are working, and for our targeted approach on clamping down on avoidance, evasion and non-compliance, for example. That requires these sophisticated hubs that have the right skills to do that job, so I defend our reorganisation entirely.

On the portrayal of the economy that the hon. Lady has just given, we have the highest level of employment in our history, more women in work than at almost any time in our history and unemployment lower than at any time in the past 45 years. We are bearing down on the deficit and have debt falling as a percentage of GDP.

John Glen: I am very sorry but I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman’s characterisation of the Government’s intentions. We have actually rolled out a comprehensive strategy across the country in terms of the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine with the systematic devolution of decision making and resources to enable growth throughout the country.

Economic Growth: Car Industry

14. Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): What assessment his Department has made of the effect on economic growth of levels of (a) car sales and (b) investment in the car industry.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): The automotive sector is an extremely valuable part of the UK economy and we have worked very closely with it in recent years. We have established the first automotive sector deal, and we have backed research and development projects, such as the advanced propulsion centre, with £300 million of investment. Through the future of mobility grand challenge and a succession of Budget measures, we are supporting the development of and transition to low emission and autonomous vehicles.

Matt Western: The Chancellor will be well aware of the importance of car sales and manufacturer investment as indicators of economic output and business confidence respectively. In the year to May, car sales were down 7% and truck sales were down 6%. Investment by vehicle manufacturers fell by 55% in 2017 versus 2015, and by 47% in 2018 versus 2017 for the first quarter of the year, so it is on track to be down 75% from three years ago. Does the Chancellor accept that these figures are the reality behind the Foreign Secretary’s assertion—I think this was the phrase—“fudge business”?

Robert Jenrick: As I have just described, the automotive sector is extremely important, and few of its businesses are more important than Jaguar Land Rover, which I appreciate is close to the hon. Gentleman’s constituency. Car sales in 2017 were actually 25% higher than in 2015 and the UK remains the second biggest car market in Europe after Germany, so there is a great deal to celebrate in the UK automotive sector, and we will continue to support it.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): In the light of Brexit, just this morning the British Chambers of Commerce published a list of two dozen vital questions to which British business needs answers, 10 of which are specifically relevant to the car industry. What assessment has the Chancellor made of the potential loss of business investment in the UK car industry as a result of the Government’s failure to provide answers to those questions?

Robert Jenrick: We are working closely with the automotive sector, and the Treasury and other Departments have met its representatives on a number of occasions. The Prime Minister has made it clear that our intention throughout the current negotiations is to ensure that EU-UK trade is as frictionless as possible. We will continue to work with the automotive sector to ensure that we deliver a good Brexit deal for it.
Topical Questions

T1. [906215] Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): My principal responsibility is to ensure economic stability and the continued prosperity of the British people, both during this period of heightened uncertainty and beyond it, after Brexit. I will do so by building on the plans that I set out in the autumn Budget and the spring statement. The Prime Minister recently announced a five-year NHS funding package that will boost spending on health by more than £20 billion a year in real terms in England alone. She also confirmed that we will stick to our fiscal rules and continue to reduce debt. It is our balanced approach to the public finances that enables us to give households, businesses and our public services targeted support in the near term, as well as to invest in the future of this country and to get debt down to be fair to the next generation.

Tom Brake: The Chancellor mentioned the NHS funding package. Will he confirm how much of that extra funding will come from the Brexit dividend, and how much will come from higher taxes for businesses and individuals, and on alcohol and fuel?

Mr Hammond: Obviously, the element of funding that can be provided by net savings from contributions to the European Union will depend intrinsically on the deal that we negotiate with the European Union. We will be working to get the very best possible deal that we can for Britain to ensure that that contribution makes up the largest possible proportion of the additional NHS funding.

Tom Brake (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Only 15% of people who start their working lives in entry-level jobs in this country manage to rise above that level. This country would be more prosperous and socially just, and would have a bigger tax base, if we could help them. What more can we do to help that segment of the population?

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss): My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The way in which we will get higher wages is by improving productivity and skills, which is why we are investing in a record level of apprenticeships and the national training partnership.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) pointed out, the British Chambers of Commerce has said today that its patience with the Government over Brexit is at “breaking point”. Its sense of frustration reflects accurately what trade unions and businesses across the country feel. All the British Chambers of Commerce wants are answers to some very basic questions, so will the Chancellor and those on the Treasury Bench provide some answers today? Post-Brexit, will goods be subject to new procedures and delayed at border points? Will regulation checks on goods conducted in the UK be recognised in Europe? Will firms be able to transfer staff between the UK and the EU as they do now? Above all else, will Ministers stop squabbling and provide some answers to these vital questions?

Mr Philip Hammond: It is fascinating to see the right hon. Gentleman posing as the champion of business when he has been attacking and undermining business ever since he got into his current position. Yes, I recognise all the questions he asked. The Cabinet will meet on Friday to set out our way forward in our negotiation with the European Union. We recognise that this is now urgent and that we need to make progress. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned minimising frictions and maximising flexibility for employers in order to protect jobs and investment. We agree with him and the British Chambers of Commerce on all those things, and we will be looking to deliver a Brexit that maximises employment and prosperity in this country.

John McDonnell: The Chancellor does not have to worry about others undermining capitalism; the Government are doing a pretty good job themselves.

When the warring factions in the Cabinet meet this weekend, it is the role of Treasury Ministers to bring them into the real world and point out to them firmly the real cost of a no-deal Brexit for jobs, the economy and all our living standards, so will the Chancellor tell us today the Treasury’s latest estimate of the cost of no deal, its consequences for the economy and the potential loss of jobs? Surely it is time for him to show a bit of grit and to make it clear that no responsible Chancellor could remain in a Cabinet that is so recklessly putting our economy at risk through no deal?

Mr Hammond: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that I will be setting out for my colleagues, in the privacy of our Cabinet meeting on Friday, the Treasury’s assessment—indeed, the cross-Whitehall economic group’s assessment—of the implications of potential routes forward. However, as the Prime Minister has said, we cannot give a running commentary in public on a matter about which we are in intensive negotiation with our European interlocutors. I have said before, and say again today, that when the time comes for Parliament to vote on our proposed package, I will make sure that all the available material is put into the public domain so that Members of Parliament are properly informed.

T4. [906218] Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): Only 15% of people who start their working lives in entry-level jobs in this country manage to rise above that level. This country would be more prosperous and socially just, and would have a bigger tax base, if we could help them. What more can we do to help that segment of the population?

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): My hon. Friend raises a very important point. The Government are determined that we should have an international tax regime that is appropriate to the digital technologies to which he refers, particularly search engines, online marketplaces and social media platforms. We are working with the OECD and the European Union on a multilateral response. In the absence of that, we are prepared to act unilaterally to make sure that fair taxes are paid by those businesses.
T2. [906216] **Ellie Reeves** (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): The Legal Aid. Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 was intended to save £450 million a year on legal aid, but last year’s spending was more than £950 million down from 2010 levels. As we find ourselves in an access to justice crisis, what discussions have Treasury Ministers had with the Ministry of Justice about increasing the money available for legal aid as part of the LASPO review?

**Elizabeth Truss:** We are conducting a review of LASPO at the moment. I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for Justice, and we are making sure that the Department has the resources it needs.

T9. [906223] **Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Fly-tipping is now a major nuisance to my constituents. The cost of dealing with even a single instance can run to thousands of pounds, and that does not include the cost of investigating for hazardous waste and trying to get prosecutions. Will the Minister consider the case for additional funding to enable my local council of Bromley, as well as other councils, to pay for the battle against environmental criminals?

**The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick):** Fly-tipping and illegal waste sites are a blight in many parts of the country. The Chancellor announced additional funding in the Budget for enforcement activities. The Environment Secretary recently announced a review of waste crime, and we will follow the results of that closely.

T3. [906217] **Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): As the Ministers on the Treasury Bench know, there are strongly held and differing views about the fairness of the implementation of the Treasury’s 2019 loan charge. Recent media reports have identified the severe impact that this huge retrospective charge is having on the mental health of some contractors, and I have real concerns for their wellbeing. Will the Minister commit to setting up a 24-hour helpline to provide support for individuals caught in this trap?

**Mel Stride:** The issue that the hon. Gentleman identifies is an important element of the tax avoidance that has been happening in our country. The vast majority of people pay the correct level of tax, but there have been schemes, such as the disguised remuneration schemes to which he refers, through which essentially very little tax indeed has been paid. The Government believe that that is wrong and that we should act to clean up the arrangements. We have given individuals until April 2019 to do exactly that. On the support that he mentions, HMRC’s door is of course always open for individuals in that situation to have discussions. I would urge all those individuals to make contact with HMRC to find a sensible way forward.

**Nicky Morgan** (Loughborough) (Con): I warmly welcome what the Chancellor says about putting all information before Parliament before we vote on the final withdrawal agreement later this year, but of course that will not be the end of parliamentary involvement, because we will have to onshore all the current EU financial services legislation, including the binding technical standards. Will the Chancellor set out the Treasury’s thinking so far about how that process will be democratically accountable to Parliament or perhaps the Select Committees?

**Mr Philip Hammond:** My right hon. Friend asks about Parliament’s role in dealing with the onshoring of a very large number of financial services regulations. Some of them will be dealt with through a parliamentary process, but other areas of financial services regulation are dealt with by the independent regulators—the Financial Conduct Authority and the Bank of England. I will write to her and give her as much detail as I can about how that will break down between the different categories.

T5. [906219] **Imran Hussain** (Bradford East) (Lab): The Chancellor and his Ministers accuse Labour of doom and gloom. Well, let me ask him this: what does he say to the hundreds of people in my constituency who are homeless as a result of his austerity? What does he say to the parents who send children to school hungry as a result of his austerity? What does he say to the communities that have been devastated as a result of his austerity? Is it not time that the Chancellor came out of his ivory tower and connected to reality?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is a cheeky chappie in this Chamber. I counted no fewer than four questions, to which I know the Chancellor, with his customary intellectual dexterity, will reply with one answer, embracing the gamut of issues if he wishes.

**Mr Hammond:** Indeed, Mr Speaker. What I will say is that we have spent the last eight years cleaning up the mess that was left behind for us by the last Labour Government and trying to mitigate its impacts on ordinary families up and down this country. It is the same whenever Labour gets into power: it is always ordinary people and the most vulnerable in society who suffer the most, and it is always the Tory party that has to clean up the mess.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): To follow on from the question asked by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), the retrospective nature of the 2019 loan charge could bankrupt thousands of people. Will the Government revise legislation to ensure that that does not happen, with the loan charge only applying to disguised remuneration loans made after the passing of the Finance (No. 2) Act 2017?

**Mel Stride:** This is not retrospective legislation. The activities and arrangements entered into by those who are in scope of this measure were not legal when they were entered into, even though they may have been entered into in the past. The loan charge is there not to apply penalties for that behaviour, but to ensure that those individuals pay the right amount of tax.
Robert Jenrick: I am not familiar with the project that the hon. Lady mentions, but I will look into it immediately and write to her.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) was inadvertently erased, but I will come to him momentarily—he need not fear.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): There was a recent announcement about extending contracts for rental homes to three years and losing the six-month rental position. May I urge the Treasury to look carefully at that? The last thing we want is fewer rental homes on the market and higher costs, as that would also have an impact on welfare costs.

Mr Philip Hammond: That consultation was announced by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. I am acutely conscious of the risks that my right hon. Friend sets out. I assure him that I have looked very carefully at the wording of the consultation and I am confident that we will not fall into the trap that he suggests. We are looking at making a three-year term the default option for private sector renting.

T6. [906220] Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): In its report published today, which was commissioned by the Co-op party, the New Economics Foundation identifies lack of access to finance as a significant inhibitor in the growth of the co-op sector. While I am grateful to the Economic Secretary to the Treasury for his interest in this area, I wonder what steps the Treasury might now take to tackle that problem.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I held a workshop with representatives of various credit unions this week, and one with community development financial institutions last week. I have convened a working group from the financial inclusion taskforce, which will meet in September to consider urgently expanding access to credit options on better terms than the high-cost ones that exist in the market. We are doing all that we can to incentivise growth in that sector.

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): Dartford has seen over 1,000 new homes built in and around the town during the past 12 months, which is more than anywhere in Kent and one of the highest figures in the country. Does the Minister agree that investment in infrastructure needs to complement those new homes, not wait for several years?

Robert Jenrick: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is why we have created the £4 billion housing infrastructure fund—it is exactly to deal with this problem—and a £600 billion pipeline of new infrastructure projects. He and I have already met to discuss the issues in his constituency, and we will be taking that forward.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): Is it possible to provide the funding that our NHS needs and at the same time keep to the reckless tax cuts that the Government announced in their manifesto last year?

Mr Philip Hammond: We did not announce any reckless tax cuts in the manifesto last year. The Prime Minister made it very clear in her announcement about NHS funding that we will continue to deliver on our fiscal rules, and we will continue to ensure that debt falls. I will make announcements at future fiscal events explaining exactly how we will do that.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Given that the independent Centre for Economics and Business Research has said that the fuel duty freeze has contributed to creating 121,000 jobs, and that the Treasury said in 2014 that the benefits of the fuel duty freeze had offset the loss in tax income, does the Minister not agree that it would be absolute madness to raise fuel duty and hit working people up and down this country?

Mel Stride: I thank my right hon. Friend for his very relevant and, may I say, predictable question—he has been a doughty campaigner on this particular issue—but all I would say to him is that we will of course be looking at taxation, with everybody in their different ways paying a little bit more, to make sure that we fund the significant amount we have now committed to our national health service.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Rail electrification and the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon have both been scrapped by the British Government because they were not deemed good value for money. When it comes to designing the criteria for the proposed UK shared prosperity fund, will an immediate return on investment be the priority, as with every project scrapped in Wales?

Elizabeth Truss: We are looking closely at the shared prosperity fund to make sure that it delivers best value for money right across the UK, and I am in discussions with the Welsh Secretary about that.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): What is my hon. Friend’s reaction to the FCA report on doorstep lending, and does it go far enough?

John Glen: The report is a welcome step forward, and I note the provision that is made for further steps if the proposed measures do not have an effect. I will be meeting Andrew Bailey tomorrow morning to discuss it further.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Over 1,600 people work at the Jaguar Land Rover engine plant in Wolverhampton, and the car industry has serious concerns about the Government’s plans to leave the customs union. Will the Chancellor guarantee that, when he goes to Chequers later this week, he will only sign up to a customs arrangement that preserves just-in-time manufacturing and integrated European supply chains?

Mr Philip Hammond: I assure the hon. Lady that on Friday, as I have done consistently for the past two years, I will argue for a future relationship with the European Union that protects our important supply chains, protects British jobs and protects British business.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): British insurers, such as the ones based in Chelmsford, face a dilemma over what will happen to their European clients’ contracts: it would be immoral for them not to pay out on claims,
but illegal if they do so. Will you urge the European regulators to come up with the same sensible, pragmatic solutions as the British regulators?

Mr Speaker: Well, I won’t, but the Chancellor might.

Mr Hammond: Yes, Mr Speaker, I will. I can tell my hon. Friend that we have established a European working group between the Bank of England and the European Central Bank to look at questions of contract continuity and other threats to financial stability over the period when we leave at the end of March. That will be looking at insurance contracts, and it will also be looking at the very large number of outstanding derivative contracts that could also, theoretically, become unenforceable at that point.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Who can ask a single-sentence question? I call Chris Williamson.

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): Public services define a decent society, but analysis by the Local Government Association has revealed that councils face a £8 billion black hole by 2025; public services are in meltdown. When will the Chancellor stop behaving like a public services vandal and start resourcing the public services that communities desperately need?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is clearly a devoted fan of the semicolon.

Mr Hammond: That is the answer, Mr Speaker.

There will be a spending review next year, when we will look at the overall spending envelope and the Government’s priorities across the entire range of public spending.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I was pleased to welcome the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to my constituency a couple of weeks ago. Does she agree that the enthusiasm that we heard from local businessmen for free ports and free zones could be the way ahead for economic growth in Immingham and the surrounding area?

Elizabeth Truss: I was hugely impressed by the enthusiasm in Grimsby, Cleethorpes and Immingham for more development and more opportunities for free zones—and also by the fantastic fish and chips we had on Cleethorpes pier.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): On his way to Chequers, will the Chancellor give a thought to health trusts such as Calderdale and Huddersfield NHS Foundation Trust? It still cannot deliver the healthcare that my constituents and people in the rest of west Yorkshire want because of the PFI hanging around their necks. Will he do something about PFIs?

Mr Philip Hammond: I am afraid that I have to remind the hon. Gentleman that 86% of all PFI contracts currently in place in the NHS, draining money out of NHS trusts, were put in place by the previous Labour Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are very short of time. I will take two more: Kevin Hollinrake; and then Helen Goodman.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Cons): The all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking is undertaking an important body of work on dispute resolution between banks and business. We will give it a parliamentary launch next week. Once the Minister has had time to digest the contents of that report, will he meet us to see how we can take the recommendations forward?

John Glen: I eagerly await the report’s launch next Wednesday. I will be happy to meet the all-party group and make a judgment about the best outcome on that issue, along with three other streams of work, in the autumn.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): Ending tax secrecy in the overseas territories will bring in £10 billion a year. Will the Chancellor organise a lunch for my right hon. Friend the Member for Barking (Dame Margaret Hodge), the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell) and the entire Labour Whips Office, who were instrumental in securing this change?

Mr Philip Hammond: When I have the money in the bank, I will invite them around for a glass of champagne.

Mr Speaker: That is a pretty generous offer from the Treasury—[Interruption] It will be recorded in Hansard; it will be in the Official Report tomorrow.
Govia Thameslink/Rail Electrification

12.42 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to update the House on Govia Thameslink Railway and his plans for rail electrification.

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The shadow Transport Secretary has asked about the current situation on Govia Thameslink Railway and electrification, and I will answer each in turn.

Performance by GTR has been unacceptable since the timetable change on 20 May. GTR is working to increase the predictability and reliability of journeys on its network, including reducing the number of on-the-day cancellations. On 15 July, it will implement an interim timetable, which will allow GTR to slowly build up services to the originally planned May timetable.

We have said that passengers affected by severe disruption on GTR will receive special compensation; an announcement will follow shortly. We have also commissioned the independent Glaister review to make sure that we learn lessons and that this does not happen again. We have started a formal review of the franchise to establish whether GTR has met its contractual obligations in the planning and delivery of the May timetable. We will not hesitate to take tough action against it if it is found to have been negligent.

On electrification, the Government are clear that passengers expect high-quality rail services. We are committed to electrification where it delivers passenger benefits and value for money. We will also take advantage of state-of-the-art new technology to improve rail journeys.

Over recent days, there has been speculation over the trans-Pennine route upgrade. I can clarify for colleagues that the upgrade will account for one third of our anticipated expenditure for rail enhancements nationwide in the next spending period. It will be the biggest single investment we will make during this period, demonstrating our commitment to improving passenger journeys in the north.

The Department is currently awaiting Network Rail’s final project plan. We have instructed it to prioritise the elements that bring the quickest passenger benefits. We will update the House in due course.

Andy McDonald: Reports over the weekend said that a decision had been taken to cancel the electrification of the trans-Pennine route between Manchester and Leeds. If true, much needed investment will be slashed, despite the north lagging far behind the south-east in terms of transport spending. It will kill any notion of a northern powerhouse. The Government should be matching Labour’s commitment of £10 billion-plus to build a Crossrail for the north, not threatening already promised investment.

As the National Audit Office report revealed, the technology that the Minister says makes electrification unnecessary does not exist. As the Transport Committee last week showed, rail electrification is necessary to deliver the improvements the Minister has promised. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that the electrification will go ahead as promised?

We also hear that GTR is being stripped of its franchise unless performance on its services in the south-east of England rapidly improves, and that the process could start within a matter of weeks. If that is so, when will the decision be made?

The Secretary of State says that he does not run the railway. I can tell him that we have noticed. But if not him, who does?

It is reported that the compensation package for passengers impacted by timetabling disruption will be the equivalent of one month’s travel. Can the Minister explain who will pay for this?

We on the Labour Benches would welcome this incompetent train operator being stripped of its franchise, with services returning to public ownership. We have been calling for this for years, as GTR has repeatedly breached its obligations. Passengers have suffered needlessly because of the Secretary of State’s refusal to do so. Will he now do the right thing and terminate this franchise?

Joseph Johnson: On the points made with respect to the railways in the north of England, I remind the House that the Government will have spent £13 billion by 2020 on transport in the north of England, the biggest programme of investment in decades. Specifically with regard to the trans-Pennine route, we will be spending £2.9 billion in the next control period, control period 6, between 2019 and 2024. We are looking carefully at the options Network Rail has presented to the Department and we will make a statement later in the year, ensuring that we deliver the highest possible value for taxpayers and significant benefits for passengers in the north of England.

On GTR, as I said, we have put in place a hard review of its performance in the run-up to the implementation of the May 2020 timetable. No options are off the table, should it be found to have been negligent in any respect.

The shadow Secretary of State asked about compensation. As he knows, we have already announced compensation for passengers affected by the timetabling debacle in the north of England on Northern. We will be coming forward with a similar rail industry-funded scheme for Thameslink and Great Northern passengers.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): There was absolute chaos again on GTR-Great Northern yesterday for my constituents. The situation is not getting better. How long does this have to go on before they lose their franchises?

Joseph Johnson: My right hon. Friend is understandably exceptionally frustrated and angry on behalf of her constituents. I completely understand that. GTR is putting in place a new interim timetable on 15 July. It is vital that this timetable makes real progress in stabilising services on Thameslink and Great Northern, on which her constituents and those of other Members’ depend.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): We are constantly told by the Secretary of State that we should not believe everything we read in the newspapers, but it seems to be the only way we can actually get some information we trust. The Minister stands at the Dispatch Box and says there will be a full statement on the electrification project later on in the year. That does not engender confidence.
On the performance of GTR, for once I agree with the right hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames), who said it was an absolute disaster. For once, I agree with the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), who said that this is a crisis. Does the Minister agree with his colleagues?

According to a Library briefing, in 2016-17, Thameslink, Southern and Great Northern received a subsidy of nearly £100 million. Does that really reflect value for money or does it not reflect the reality of franchising economics? When will the Government admit that the franchising system is broken and do something constructive about it? The Minister says that the travel compensation scheme will be funded by industry. What measures will be put in place to make sure that the industry does not claw that money back from the Government in one way or another?

The Secretary of State has blamed the unions and Network Rail, even though he is the one responsible for Network Rail. He blames anybody but himself. Charles Horton resigned as chair of Govia Thameslink. Does the Minister agree that it is time that the Secretary of State looks in the mirror, admits his culpability and does the right thing and resigns as well?

Joseph Johnson: With respect to the speculation in the newspapers over the weekend, I clarify for the House that we are reviewing the options that have been presented to the Department by Network Rail on how we can make the most of the £2.9 billion that the Department and the Government have set aside for this important scheme. It represents one third of the entire enhancement budget across the entire railway network for the five-year period starting in 2019, and it is entirely right that the Government ensure that we get good value for money from it and deliver passenger benefits to the greatest extent that we possibly can.

The hon. Gentleman asked about GTR. A new chief executive is coming into post. I am due to speak to him later today. He has the vital task of ensuring that the new timetable that it is putting in place on 15 July stabilises services as rapidly as possible.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Minister will know, because unfortunately for him I keep WhatsApping him every time my angry constituents tweet or email me, of the utterly unacceptable three-hour gaps that remain between trains at peak times in commuter villages. Four-carriage trains are turning up rather than 12-carriage trains; this is becoming an issue of safety, not just reliability. I understand that franchise removal could be the ultimate conclusion but, when he does his hard review, will he look at the commuter villages as well as the main hub stations in making that decision? Can he just give us a clue: what would the alternative be, are the risks worth it and will the service be better?

Joseph Johnson: As my hon. Friend knows, I am in contact with her on a regular basis about the situation affecting her constituents using stations such as Royston and St Neots—

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Royston is mine.

Joseph Johnson: Stations near my hon. Friend’s constituency—Letchworth as well. Obviously, we see the pattern of services there as having been unacceptable in recent days and we have been pressing GTR to work tirelessly to ensure that it improves performance as rapidly as possible. As the Secretary of State has made clear, all options are on the table for the outcome of the review should it be found to have been negligent in any way in implementing this timetable.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): Coming off the back of all the turmoil that we have seen on Northern and elsewhere recently, is not this equivocation on the electrification of the Manchester-to-Leeds line just another really serious blow for people in the north, who now feel overwhelmingly, time and again, that they are getting a second-class service from this Government? Will the Minister please offer some political leadership on this issue and say, “This line and its electrification is of such strategic importance that we will make it happen come what may”?

Joseph Johnson: The Government are signalling their political commitment to the north of England by spending £13 billion on transport in the north in the years to 2020 and by allocating £2.9 billion to the trans-Pennine route upgrade alone. As I have already said, that represents a third of the entire rail enhancement budget for that five-year period. The trans-Pennine upgrade will be a phased project. It will be a rolling programme of enhancements, including major civil engineering projects and electrification.

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): Customers on Gvia Thameslink Railway have only 28 days to submit a claim under delay repay, yet this disruption has gone on for the last 44 days. The amount of time required to submit those claims is extensive. Will the Minister ensure that everyone who has had a valid claim since 20 May receives compensation?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, we are working very carefully with GTR and the rest of the industry to ensure that proper compensation is made available to everybody who has suffered on the most severely affected routes. We have already done so for passengers on Northern and other parts of the north of England. We will make an announcement about compensation for passengers on severely affected GTR routes, Thameslink and Great Northern shortly.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I attended an event last week at which many senior members of the railway industry were present. Clearly, it was well known that these problems would exist if the new timetable were introduced. What is the Minister doing to ensure that the industry advises him and his colleagues of any problems that may exist in the future?

Joseph Johnson: The Secretary of State has set up an independent review chaired by Professor Stephen Glaister, who is the chair of the Office of Rail and Road. He is looking at all the lessons that need to be learnt from the May timetable changes to ensure that we do not repeat the same mistakes in December 2018 and with subsequent timetable changes of that scale.
Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): My constituents are still experiencing delays, overcrowding and cancellations. In every meeting I have attended with TransPennine, Northern and the Secretary of State, I have been reassured that everything will be okay once we get electrification going. The Secretary of State is saying that we do not need to electrify all of every route, so will the Minister reassure the House now that, when electrification goes ahead, it will be the whole route and there will not be cherry-picking of what is most financially viable?

Joseph Johnson: The Department wants to get the best value for passengers and taxpayers out of the £2.9 billion that has been set aside for the trans-Pennine route upgrade. All Members of the House should be able to understand that objective. The Department is currently awaiting Network Rail’s final project plan and we have instructed it to prioritise those elements that bring the quickest passenger benefits.

Sir Oliver Heald: My hon. Friend is right, and of course that is exactly what the Department is doing. We have a so-called hard review team in with GTR at the moment getting ready for exactly the eventuality that we need to put in the operator of last resort, should the review conclude that Network Rail has been negligent and does not have the managerial—[Interruption. / GTR, I beg your pardon, has been negligent and does not have the managerial strengths to deal with the challenges that that bit of the network faces.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister is being far too measured in his response. He should stop pussyfooting about and put the boot in. He should sack Southern and GTR, boost compensation for passengers and hand over responsibility for rail services in London to Transport for London.

Joseph Johnson: The Secretary of State has been clear that he is leaving all options on the table should GTR be found to have been negligent. He is clear that the operator of last resort will be ready to step in, should that turn out to be the case, but of course the Department wants to follow all the correct processes in this matter.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): We are now into week seven of this Thameslink timetable shambles, and there is no sign of the service getting better. Never mind electrification—frankly, trains were more reliable 100 years ago in the age of steam. Will the Minister confirm that the compensation package that he is to announce will be generous and that specifically, it will be funded by GTR, because its shareholders, not the taxpayer, should bear the pain for this appalling performance?

Joseph Johnson: I sympathise with my right hon. Friend’s concerns. His constituents, including those who use Hassocks station, which we have discussed on a number of occasions, have endured an unacceptable level of service, and he has been a strong champion for them. They will receive compensation and we will be setting out details of that compensation plan in coming days. It will be comparable, as the Secretary of State has indicated, with the compensation that was given to passengers on Southern about a year and a half ago.

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): With trains cancelled and delayed and journey times between Leeds and Manchester airport in my constituency up by 12 minutes, how does the Minister think the northern rail project is going, especially given the news at the weekend that he is reneging on the commitment to electrify the line between those two cities?

Joseph Johnson: I have already addressed the issue of the trans-Pennine route upgrade. We await Network Rail’s final project plan for how to make the best use of the £2.9 billion the Government have set aside for it. It is a significant investment, and it is entirely right that the Government seek to secure the best value for money, both for passengers and for taxpayers.

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I get no sense of urgency from the Minister about the devastating impact this is having on my constituents. The timetable changes will see a reduction in services for passengers in Plumpton, Lewes, Seaford, Berwick, Polegate and Wivelsfield, and since the disaster of the timetable roll-out, we are constantly seeing short-formed trains—which are severely overcrowded, station-skipping in rural areas, where there is no other form of public transport, leaving vulnerable passengers, young people and people with a disability stranded—and late-night cancellations. It took three hours to travel 50 miles home last night, and three out of the first seven trains were cancelled this morning. This is unacceptable. The franchise must go.

Joseph Johnson: My hon. Friend speaks powerfully on behalf of her constituents, and has done consistently. We are looking at this as a matter of urgency. It is the Department’s top priority to ensure that the unacceptable level of service comes to an end and that passengers get the standard of rail they have every right to expect. The Secretary of State has been absolutely clear that all options are available to him should GTR be found to have been negligent with respect to its contractual obligations.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Seat bookings issued for carriages that do not actually exist; new 10-carriage trains where only five are available because passengers cannot walk from one end of the train to the other; trains cancelled because the companies do not have enough staff to run both parts of the train; endless cancellations; toilets that either do not work or where passengers get locked in, but where they do at least end up with a seat—this is complete and utter chaos. My constituents would dearly love to see the Government gripping this and making sure it gets sorted now; not in some distant future.

Joseph Johnson: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful case on behalf of his constituents, and I understand his concerns on their behalf. We are improving the Great Western main line. There is a substantial investment programme, and, yes, there is considerable room for
improvement, but it is good that more than 100 million rail journeys will improve next year as a result of the significant investment the Government are undertaking.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): GTR’s performance has been abysmal not just for the past few weeks but for a number of years, with constituents unable to get home to see loved ones and some having even lost their jobs as a result of train lateness and cancellations. The timetable fiasco is simply the latest instalment in that record of failure. On Saturday morning, I tried to get from Coulsdon South to the centre of London and ended up having to drive because the trains were cancelled. This company is incompetent and the time has come for it to lose the franchise. I urge the Minister to act.

Joseph Johnson: That is the exactly why the Secretary of State has put in place the hard review. If GTR is found to have been negligent, he will have the full gamut of options available to him, including the removal of the franchise.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): I can catalogue similar misery endured by passengers from Cambridge, but the key question is: how did this happen? The conclusion I came to, listening to evidence to the Transport Committee, was that at the key time no one was in place to make the call. So let me ask: who is in charge of our railways?

Joseph Johnson: We have a lot to learn as an industry from what went wrong, which is why the Secretary of State has set up the Glaister review, an independent review chaired by the Office of Rail and Road. It is important that we learn all the lessons from what happened in the run-up to May to ensure that mistakes are not made again in December and May 2019.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): The Government’s strategy is to combine track and train. How does the Minister think this will improve the lot of passengers?

Joseph Johnson: My hon. Friend refers to the Secretary of State’s strategic vision for rail, published last November, which seeks more integration between train operating companies and Network Rail to ensure less buck passing and less of the blame game in the future. A foretaste of how that will work can be seen in the new west coast partnership and the east coast partnership publications.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Campaign to Electrify Britain’s Railway has calculated that the cost of electrifying the main line between Swansea and Cardiff at today’s prices is only £130 million, which is considerably cheaper than the Department’s estimation. Electrification has been rolled out across Europe, and indeed in Scotland, at a cost of about £1 million per mile, while High Speed 2 will cost more than £400 million. Will the Minister look again at the CEBR figures and finish the job of electrifying the main line all the way to the west of my country?

Joseph Johnson: Our focus in the Department is on securing the greatest passenger benefits in a tax-efficient and value-for-money way. It was found that electrifying the route between Cardiff and Swansea would provide poor value for money and little by way of incremental time savings to passengers. It would not bring the significant journey time savings we would expect for such an expenditure and would result in significant disruption for passengers on the line.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I welcome the Minister’s commitment on compensation to my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), which will benefit our constituents. May I draw his attention to the problem of short-formed trains? Too often, fewer trains are coming into crowded platforms and they are short-formed, which forces passengers to pack themselves into trains that are far too small and in sweltering conditions. If GTR gets nothing else right, can it please sort that out in the coming weeks?

Joseph Johnson: Indeed, that is one element we will look at as we assess whether GTR has managed to stabilise services following the introduction of the new interim timetable on 15 July.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): People in Enfield who aspire to get on a train are running up and down the platform in the mornings, but the trains are full by the time they reach us, because of the delays and cancellations. Yesterday, almost half of all trains were either delayed or cancelled, and on 15 July we get our third timetable in two months. This cannot be acceptable. The Minister is a sight too relaxed for my liking about this matter. Does he realise that people in Enfield and further afield have completely lost faith in the Government’s ability to manage the railways? And the Government do manage the railways!

Joseph Johnson: We are working urgently on improving GTR’s performance. It has a new chief executive coming in as we speak whose task is clear with respect to the instructions he has received from the Department, which are to get performance back to where it should be as rapidly as possible.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): Bedford rail users are facing misery, delays and cancellations almost every hour. It is complete chaos. It is clear that GTR has breached the terms of the franchise and that it should be taken back into public ownership. When will the Minister stop making excuses, get a reliable timetable in place and commit to reinstating east midlands peak services for Bedford?

Joseph Johnson: As I have said, GTR is introducing a new timetable on 15 July, and it will be held to account for the success of that new timetable. We want services to Bedford to improve as part of that.

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): Following the answers to my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), can the Minister confirm that it is no longer the Government’s commitment to fully electrify the route between Manchester and Leeds, and will he tell us where the Secretary of State is today—has he missed his train?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, we await Network Rail’s final options plan for how to make the best use of the £2.9 billion allocated to the trans-Pennine route upgrade. As all Members will understand, that is an important
part of how government makes use of taxpayer resources. We want it to deliver the best value for money. That will include major civil engineering projects and electrification.

**Clive Efford** (Eltham) (Lab): Govia is also responsible for Southeastern. As the Minister will know from just a glance at Twitter this morning, our constituents were telling us yet again that they were suffering delays. Why do the Government consistently put the shareholders of Govia above the interests of our constituents? It is time for both franchises to be taken away from Govia.

**Joseph Johnson**: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s concern for passengers in his constituency. We want them to receive the services that they have every right to expect. As I have said, we are looking at GTR’s performance with that franchise, and we will not hesitate to take the appropriate actions should they be necessary.

**Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): The Government gave my constituents a solemn pledge to electrify the midland main line, only to renege on their promises. The Minister’s response to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) about the trans-Pennine route seemed to indicate that they will not proceed with the electrification of that route either. Does the Minister not realise that reneging on solemn pledges of this kind brings the political process into disrepute? Will he now say from the Dispatch Box that he will reverse those cuts in much-needed upgrades?

**Joseph Johnson**: Announcements relating to the hon. Gentleman’s questions were made in July 2017. Passengers on the midland main line will benefit from a brand-new Glaister review, which are public, allow for that.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): As we have been talking about the north, I want to ask a question about it. I believe that the Rail Minister is also the Minister for London; it is a shame that the Secretary of State, who has the whole country on his watch, is not here today. If it is true that the Department has not yet signed off the trans-Pennine money, why can we not transfer the power to decide what is best for the north from the Department to Transport for the North, which is what the One North campaign has been asking for?

**Joseph Johnson**: Transport for the North exists as a statutory body and has the ability to ensure that all transport investment decisions are informed by its transport strategy. We await with interest and excitement the publication of that strategy later in the year, so that northern transport authorities can prioritise appropriately what they see as the needs of passengers in the north.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): The electrification work in the Severn tunnel has been a big failure. Rusting kit has led to the closure of the tunnel for three weeks and caused disruption to passengers, and it is very poor value for money. What is the financial cost of this electrification fault?

**Joseph Johnson**: Cost overruns on that project have been a feature over the course of its life. We are looking carefully into the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised, and we will follow that up with him directly.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Does the Minister understand the depth of anger and dismay in the north at the shadow that has now been cast over the full electrification of the trans-Pennine route? What assessment is he making of the impact on our economy and on future inward investment?

**Joseph Johnson**: The Government are making a massive investment in transport in the north of England, but Labour Members seem to be intent on downplaying its scale. It is worth reminding the House that £13 billion is being invested in northern transport in the years to 2020, and £2.9 billion is being invested in the trans-Pennine route upgrade alone. It is entirely right for the Government to seek the maximum value for both passengers and taxpayers when it comes to how that money is spent.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): It feels almost like groundhog day. Last night, again, it took me three hours to travel back to Brighton. What does the Transport Salaried Staffs Association, the union that represents staff—and I refer to my registered interest in that regard—say? It says that 95% of staff now face aggression from passengers whom they are unable to give any information, because the management does not give them any information, and 82% say that they have no trust in the management of the franchise any more. When will the Minister agree with passengers—and, now, with staff—and get rid of GTR?

**Joseph Johnson**: Obviously, no staff in GTR or any other train operating company should accept, or should expect to suffer, abuse of any sort from passengers in these circumstances. As the hon. Gentleman knows, a hard review of GTR’s performance is now under way, and all options will be on the table following that review.

**Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): Since the timetable changes, travelling on Southern from Eastbourne and Hampden Park has been horrific for my constituents. I was told this morning that a journey that should have taken an hour and a half had taken three and a half hours. The Minister has talked about substantial additional compensation for people travelling on Northern. May I urge him also to make a commitment to those long-standing passengers on Southern?
Joseph Johnson: The Government are committed to compensating passengers on the routes that have been most severely disrupted since the timetable change. We have already arranged compensation for passengers on Northern and other parts of the network in the north of England, and we will shortly announce details of schemes for passengers on the most disrupted parts of the GTR network. Southern’s performance, while not perfect, has not been as severely disruptive as those of the other two operators.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will, exceptionally, take the point of order now, because I believe that it appertains to earlier exchanges during Question Time. Let us hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Colin Clark: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

In my question to the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, I mentioned EU payments to farmers. I should like to set the record straight and declare an interest, in that I am a recipient of the EU single farm payment. My farming interest is recorded in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for putting that fact on the record.

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Dawn Butler: (Brent Central) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Minister for Women and Equalities if she will make a statement on the Government’s LGBT action plan.

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): In July last year the Government launched a national survey asking lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people about their experiences of living in the UK. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) for beginning that process. I am pleased that the Government are today publishing the findings of the survey, alongside an LGBT action plan that sets out their policy in response to those results.

The survey received more than 108,000 responses, which makes it the largest national survey of LGBT people conducted in the world to date. Responses covered a range of issues, including safety, health, education, and the experience of being LGBT in the UK. The findings will serve as crucial additional evidence on which we can build. While there are many positives to take from the findings, they also show that there is much more to do before we achieve equality for LGBT people in the UK. For me, one of the saddest statistics was that two thirds of respondents felt unable to hold their partner’s hand in public.

The LGBT action plan consists of 75 actions that the Government will take to address the survey’s findings. They include the appointment of a national LGBT health adviser in the NHS to tackle the health inequalities that LGBT people face, the extension of our existing anti-homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying programme, and a commitment to end the practice of conversion therapy in the UK.

I want this plan to be delivered by the end of this Parliament, and funding beyond 2019-20 will be agreed through the spending review process. The documents the Government are publishing today represent a significant milestone in the Government’s commitment to building a country that works for everyone irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Dawn Butler: I thank the Minister for her answer to the urgent question. The Government’s action plan is a welcome first step. Although I would like to have seen more action, the action that it does contain is welcome. It is built on the foundations of the Labour party manifesto—I am grateful for that. I am more than happy for the Government to appropriate Labour’s ideas and policies because the more we can work cross-party, the better legislation will be. The Government would get a quick win on legislation if they were to implement Lord Cashman’s amendment to the Policing and Crime Act 2017.

I want the Government to be successful in this and to move the LGBT+ agenda forward. The “+” is important as many groups are not included and the “+” symbolises the fact that they are included when we talk about the subject, especially in this place. Paragraph three of the executive summary refers to the “bold action” that this Government are taking “both at home and abroad.”
The lack of action on the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act 2004 created a hostile environment for trans people, so I hope that the Minister will say something that will move that forward.

We would also like to know the Government’s plans as chair of the Commonwealth. The Government now have a global platform from which to promote LGBT rights both here and abroad. Bold actions also require a stable Government and a stable Government Equalities Office. Since 2010 the current GEO has moved offices on at least four occasions and has had six different Ministers, and, shockingly, the Department’s funding has been almost halved. This type of upheaval is not conducive to a stable way of working for the equalities agenda.

Like the Government, Labour want to create an environment across the globe where people can be their true authentic selves at work, at home and publicly, and where they are not discriminated against because of who they are, who they love or how they look. I look forward to the Pride marches on Saturday and Sunday. I hope to see the Minister and her team there, and I look forward to challenging them with a #FlosswithPride dance-off.

Penny Mordaunt: I welcome the hon. Lady’s welcome of the action plan. We want to do this well and implement the action plan well at local level as well as national level, and I hope all Members on both sides of the House will help us to do that. We also want to send a clear message that this is what we want for the UK, that we need to stamp out homophobia and bigotry wherever it exists, and that we want everyone in society to be able to love who they love and be able to hold hands in public. We need that culture shift; that still needs to happen. We have come a long way but there is still much more to do. So I thank the hon. Lady for her comments.

The hon. Lady mentioned other groups covered by the “+”. They are addressed in the action plan; there are actions that will support them too, but more specifically we will also be making funding available to those groups because they need to be included in the work that is going on at national and local level. So funding will be available to groups specifically looking at those individuals. We are also setting up a new national panel that will have representatives from those groups in it, so they will be able to feed into future policy. That will be very helpful.

The hon. Lady mentioned the Gender Recognition Act consultation. We are launching that today—this afternoon. It will be launched by the Prime Minister and a written statement will be tabled to coincide with that launch. This is an incredibly important piece of work and it must be conducted as a national conversation as well as a consultation, and it must be conducted in a framework of empathy, focusing on facts, not myths, and being very practical. I hope that my speech today and the Prime Minister’s words this afternoon set that tone.

The hon. Lady mentioned our international work. There are some commitments in the action plan specifically to promote LGBT+ rights in the rest of the world. The Prime Minister took a lead on this at her key address at the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit. She spoke at length about the need to promote LGBT rights across the Commonwealth. In addition to my work at the GEO, with my other hat on as International Development Secretary, we are doing a lot of work to support civil society and talk to national Governments about their policies and procedures.

The hon. Lady mentioned funding. I must apologise to her about the confusion as there is a smorgasbord of Departments that report on the GEO’s budget, but our budget has actually gone up; with the programme budget it is close to £15 million. At my appearance at the Select Committee I confirmed that I would clarify those numbers; our funding has gone up.

It is London Pride this weekend and I will be there. Over the summer there will be many other Pride events going on around the country. I feel that as the hon. Lady has thrown down the gauntlet on the dance-off, I will see her there.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am pleased to advise the House that the rainbow flag will fly above No. 1 Parliament Street and Portcullis House throughout the weekend, and I can also tell the House with some pride that ParliOUT, the workplace equality network based here, will be taking part in the Pride parade.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): It is perfect timing to launch the action plan and survey results in advance of London Pride this weekend. It shows that while this country has come a very long way—I am very proud of the fact that it was our Government who brought forward legislation on same-sex marriage—there is still a very long way to go. My right hon. Friend mentioned one of the most shocking statistics, but another is that 70% of respondents still felt that they could not be open about their sexuality or relationship because they were worried about a negative reaction. I know how that feels as I have been part of that 70% in the past, so may I simply welcome my right hon. Friend’s action plan and say that this matters because people can only be at their best when they can be themselves?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for her comments and for giving us the opportunity to do this. It is our action plan, and I mean that for every Member of this House. There are some good policies in there that, if implemented, as I hope they all will be by the end of this Parliament, will transform the lives of LGBT people. It is not just about the culture; it is also about the practical access to services that meet their needs. It is an important piece of work and my right hon. Friend should be very proud of her role in it.

Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): I, too, welcome the plan and the various aspects of it, particularly the health adviser and the plans to ban gay conversion therapy. I also welcome Vicky Beeching’s book, which I assume has advised much of this; she has spoken very openly and very bravely and was a great support to me personally before I came out.

On the plans for education, the right hon. Lady will know that a lot of this has been done in Scotland already. I put on record our thanks to the Time for Inclusive Education campaign, which I hope the right hon. Lady will also welcome as it has its third anniversary. She has shown a willingness to work with the Scottish Government, and we are proud that Scotland is one of the most inclusive and progressive countries in LGBT+ rights in the world, but will she talk about the plans to work with Scotland and the other devolved nations,
because equality is important for all countries in the UK? Will she meet me to discuss this, and, as we approach many Pride celebrations across the UK, will she agree that they are vital and that it is fantastic to see such huge celebrations?

However, there are still many corners of the UK, as this survey suggests, where LGBT+ people cannot be open. There are now Pride celebrations—such as mine in West Lothian, which is now in its fourth year—in small communities. Will the right hon. Lady look at creating a map of LGBT+ progressiveness across the UK, and address what support can be given to those small and rural communities where LGBT+ issues are still very much at the fore?

Penny Mordaunt: I also pay tribute to the individual and the organisation that the hon. Lady referred to. She is absolutely right. In my remarks this morning at the launch of the action plan, I spoke about equality in all four nations of the United Kingdom. Clearly, some of the services that we are talking about, such as healthcare, are devolved, and rightly so. The Secretary of State for Scotland was present at the launch with me, and one of the strengths of having a four-nation healthcare system is that we learn from each other and share good ideas while providing the service that is best tailored for people in their particular locality. And of course I am always happy to meet the hon. Lady.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I thank the Minister for informing me of her intention to publish the plan today, and for the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act 2004. I join her in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend for putting to the floor the idea of LGBT+ Progress. I welcome the Secretary of State for Health visiting Scotland last week to launch this and the fact that Scotland was present at the launch with me, and one of the services that we are talking about, such as healthcare, are devolved, and rightly so. The Secretary of State for Scotland was present at the launch with me, and one of the strengths of having a four-nation healthcare system is that we learn from each other and share good ideas while providing the service that is best tailored for people in their particular locality. And of course I am always happy to meet the hon. Lady.

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Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that, while we have made great progress in ensuring that rights are equal in law, we have a lot more to do to ensure that they are equal in practice? Does she also agree that we are now experiencing something of a backlash, of which the LGBT community—and particularly the trans community—are at the forefront? Will she say a bit more about how she and her Department plan to tackle this? As she said, if LGBT+ people are still frightened of holding hands in public because of the likely reaction, we still have a lot of work to do.

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. Ultimately, what will enable someone to hold their partner’s hand as they walk down the street is not a piece of legislation but a culture change in this nation. As I have said before, back in the 1980s—before many of us were in politics—we saw the homophobia that gay men, for example, faced at the time. I am sure we all agree that if we had been in politics at that time, we would have called that out and stood up for those individuals. That same scenario is happening now to the trans community, and we must show our absolute unwavering solidarity with those individuals. As I said in my speech this morning, trans women are women and trans men are men. That is the starting point for the GRA consultation, and it will be its finishing point too. We need to send out a strong message on that front, and I thank the hon. Lady for affording me the opportunity to do so.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on what she has just said about trans issues and on the action plan, which is welcome and comprehensive. I particularly congratulate her on the measures to ensure that Government support will be given through our diplomatic missions and through the Department for International Development to LGBT organisations on the ground worldwide. Will she say more about the Government’s bid for the chairmanship of the Equal Rights Coalition, which is mentioned in the action plan? That would be very welcome, as it would be a statement of the UK’s strong support for LGBT rights globally.

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my right hon. Friend for that suggestion. I am in complete agreement with him. In my time in this place, I have seen the effect of
 whichever party has been in government advancing the rights of LGBT people on other nations around the world. We now have a huge opportunity with our chairing of the Commonwealth, and there are many other opportunities coming up. I agree with him wholeheartedly on this.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): We have come a long way since my Conservative opponent in 1997 described me as a sterile, disease-ridden homosexual who would put my constituents’ children at risk. I warmly welcome the right hon. Lady’s announcements today. I thank her for the announcement on gay conversion therapy, and I ask her to thank the public health Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), and the Second Church Estates Commissioner, the right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) for the roles that they have played in helping to deliver this. On trans rights, though, will she talk to her Health colleagues about the horrendous waiting times, particularly for young people who are waiting to see a specialist and to have the counselling necessary to undergo eventual gender reassignment? They are waiting far too long at a time of great vulnerability, and many are at suicide risk. This is a critical period in their lives, and the waiting times are currently completely unacceptable.

Penny Mordaunt: I would like to add my thanks to the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester, and to others who have helped to get us where we are today. I made some detailed remarks about waiting times this morning, and about other issues relating to gender identity clinics. The Care Quality Commission is going to start inspecting those clinics, and there are many other things in the action plan that will help. The survey has given us a good understanding of the inadequacies of some services, and a good base for where we need to get to. We are determined to improve the situation.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Some of us have come quite a long way since 1997, and that also applies to the position of my party, of which I am now inordinately proud because of the 75 recommendations in the action plan and because of the way in which the survey has thrown up the prevalence of the trans issue. The number of trans people who took part in the survey clearly makes it entirely appropriate for us to make this issue a priority. Mr Speaker, I know that as president of the Kaleidoscope Trust you will be delighted with the balance of resources going into the Commonwealth and internationally from my right hon. Friend’s Department to enable our missions to directly support the groups and the very brave people who are fighting for the changes in their society that have been achieved over the past five or six decades here.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman understands me well, and I thank him for that gratuitous reference.

Penny Mordaunt: My hon. Friend makes some good points. At the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, I had the privilege of sitting down with activists from nations where citizens do not enjoy the same rights as our citizens. They are incredibly brave and must be supported, and I am conscious, in both my Government roles, that we have a duty to do that. If we want change, civil society in those countries must be kept strong.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I have married an awful lot of people in my time—[Laughter.] To one another. I have also entered a civil partnership myself. Indeed, it happened in your house, Mr Speaker. I therefore know how important a marriage or civil partnership is to the self-validation and self-respect that couples have in society. Will the Minister see off anybody who starts campaigning for the abolition of civil partnerships and instead extend them to heterosexual couples, so that everybody is treated equally under the law?

In addition, if the Bermudian Government appeal to the Privy Council to overturn the Bermudian Supreme Court’s decision to re-allow same-sex marriage in Bermuda, will the Minister also ensure that the Privy Council will say, “Get lost”? Finally, will the Minister ensure that we have same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland, or at least a free vote in this House on the matter?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his several questions. I am aware that I have a number of issues in my in-tray as Equalities Minister, civil partnerships and equal marriage in Northern Ireland being just two of them. We have private Members’ Bills before the House, and we must resolve the issues and I will examine what I can do to support that.

On civil partnerships, the hon. Gentleman may be interested to know that I have brought forward the opinion research commissioned by the Government Equalities Office that was to report in autumn next year to autumn this year—the end of the summer. We want to make good progress on all such issues.

As for Bermuda, I will ask the Foreign Office to write to the hon. Gentleman.

James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con): I suspect that I may get the same answer, but may I urge the Minister to be less diplomatic and have a chat to the Foreign Secretary to see whether we can insist on every high commission and embassy flying the rainbow flag, particularly in countries where homosexuality is illegal?

Penny Mordaunt: The message that that would send is hugely important, and I know that it is the message that all those missions and offices wish to send. However, we do have to leave it to the judgment of the people working in those countries, because I know from my experiences in the Department for International Development that we must bear in mind the safety of the people doing such work. I hope that as many buildings as possible will be flying the rainbow flag in the coming days and weeks.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I welcome not just the fact of the action plan, but the sentiment behind it and the Minister’s obvious commitment to the culture change that we all recognise is necessary. Home Office statistics from 2017 show that 70% of claims for asylum on the basis of sexuality were rejected, so will the Minister use her influence in Government to press
Penny Mordaunt: My right hon. Friend is highly consistent in his campaign. We have clearly had a ruling that we need to act on this inequality, but not specifying—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne) should remain in his place.

Sir Desmond Swayne: I was coming for the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant).

Mr Speaker: That sounds like a threat! The right hon. Gentleman should not be flirting along the Bench when the Minister is answering. He is normally a most courteous fellow, but I think he has got carried away. I know that he will now listen with respectful attention and in all solemnity to the Minister.

Penny Mordaunt: If my right hon. Friend has a moment—[Laughter.] I will tell him that there are many reasons why people value civil partnerships; it was not just about the absence of the option of marriage. Some people do not want to get married, but they want to have a partnership with their partner. Other people who have been married and then bereaved may not want to remarry, but they may want to establish a civil partnership. People value civil partnerships for many reasons. I know that my right hon. Friend is very exercised about this matter, but I can reassure him that civil partnerships will not be compulsory.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Putney (Justine Greening) on her initiative—it is a credit to her that her initiative has engaged with 108,000 people from the LGBT+ community—and I thank the Minister for the action plan.

I was shocked when, last year, a church in north Liverpool was exposed by former Liverpool Echo journalist Josh Parry as giving gay cure therapies, which are some of the most disturbing practices that could be imagined. I have raised such gay cure therapies with Ministers in the House. There had been some contradiction on those therapies before the report, and I hope the Minister will clear up some of those contradictions. The Home Office was initially dismissive, and the Department of Health and Social Care said no action would be taken. Will she clear up the contradictory advice that came from the Government before the report was published?

Furthermore, the report says: “We are not trying to prevent LGBT people from seeking legitimate...support from their faith leader”.

I push the Minister to give a commitment today that she will not leave LGBT people in faith communities behind when this action plan is implemented.

Penny Mordaunt: I am happy to give the hon. Gentleman those reassurances. We are going to ban these abhorrent practices—with the most severe form involving corrective rape, some of these so-called therapies are appalling abuse—and we will consult on the best way to do that. It may involve legislation, but there will be other things we can do, too. We clearly need to work closely with healthcare.
Obviously, we do not want to close down completely legitimate and needed psychological support and other therapies that people might want to access as they explore their gender identity or their sexual orientation. Those are important supports for individuals, but wherever those other practices are found, including in religious settings, we will have no qualms about tackling them.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): There is a lot to welcome in this action plan. I am alarmed by the statistic that two in three respondents feel they cannot hold their partner’s hand but, of course, 100% of people in same-sex relationships in Northern Ireland cannot get married. I welcome the funding and support for Commonwealth nations, but what practical support can the Minister offer people in Northern Ireland to make sure rights are advanced there, too?

Penny Mordaunt: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, which he makes very strongly. As I said, there is a private Member’s Bill option. That and other matters relating to Northern Ireland are receiving a great deal of my attention.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome today’s announcement, which is a huge step forward. What support and practical help can this action plan deliver in the regions, especially to help trans communities like Not Alone, which works so hard in Plymouth for trans and non-binary people who sometimes feel they have been left out on a limb and are not getting the support they need? Can the Minister advise on what support can be pushed into the regions so that the focus is not just on big cities?

Penny Mordaunt: There are many things we can do. Clearly a lot of the services we are looking to reform are devolved, but the £4.5 million that my Department is making available is precisely for such groups. We will shortly be announcing how groups can apply for that funding, but it is vital that those groups are empowered at a local level to shape local services and ensure people get the support they need.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): I very much welcome today’s action plan, and I look forward to reading the documentation on the reforms to the Gender Recognition Act 2004. The truth is that equality is never a job done; it is something for which we always have to strive. We would not be here today if there had not been marked progress in this area between 1997 and 2010.

In creating a debate on the Gender Recognition Act, which I agree has to happen—there is a lot in the Select Committee’s report that needs to be attended to—it must be recognised that we do not want a situation in which, in the protection of services, there is competition between the rights of the trans community and the rights for which women have fought so hard for many years. There is a way through this if people on all sides can debate it in an informed and discursive way that does not shut down conversations.

There has been abuse against the trans community, but there has also been a lot of abuse and insults against anyone who raises concerns about some of the implications. Some of it may need to be discussed, but people are genuinely worried about some of these things, and this debate should allow us to put it to bed and to make sure that we come out of it with something that is better for everybody.

Penny Mordaunt: The right hon. Lady puts it very well. The questions raised by women’s groups, for example, are completely legitimate. Sometimes people forget what we require of people who are changing their gender identity. We require them to live in their new gender for two years prior to changing their gender, so we are not catering for something new. The nation needs to have a calm, grown-up conversation, and this consultation affords us the chance to have it.

We want a good outcome. We want a less bureaucratic and more supportive process for those who are changing their gender identity, and we want those other people to be reassured. Both those sets of people have legitimate desires, and we need to come up with answers so that we have clarity on this issue and so that people can be assured of what is expected, of what is right and of how to treat people when they try to access services, and so forth.

That is how we need to conduct this debate, and I am confident that, having dispelled some of the myths, we will be able to have that debate and come up with a good outcome that suits everyone.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Minister’s announcement today on the banning of so-called gay conversion therapies is obviously enormously welcome. As part of the process, as she looks to legislation or other processes with the Home Office, will she also try to ensure that such disgusting treatments do not go underground? Will she ensure that people are not able to access them in other countries? What representations is she making not just to Commonwealth countries but to countries across the world that these conversions are not needed, that they do not work and that there is no need for a cure for being gay?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. One of the additional benefits of this action plan is that it will be a catalyst for other nations to follow suit, as has happened with other groundbreaking LGBT legislation passed by this House over many years. I hope that will be the case, and clearly the more we can shine a spotlight on these practices, the more we can educate people who might be vulnerable to going through such appalling practices and the better and more resilient people will be.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): Like others, I welcome the action plan. The weekend before last I was delighted to see that the British mission in New York had a float at Pride, and I am pleased to have taken part in Pride with the British mission over a number of years.

The survey says that 40% of LGBT+ people have experienced hate crime and that nine in 10 did not report those serious crimes. In Brighton and Hove we have an LGBT safety forum that, as a first step, does much of the important work of reporting, particularly for trans people. This and other forums across the country have never received statutory funding, which is an absolute disgrace. How does this action plan look to support such community groups, which are often the
first line of defence against violence and are often the ones dealing with the mess and picking up the pieces left behind?

**Penny Mordaunt**: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I have mentioned the funding that we will make available to support those groups and forums, and we are putting in place the national panel, which will help Whitehall in its policy generation. As well as that practical support, the action plan gives us a good platform as we go into the spending review to really look at what good practice is out there and what we might need to do in future Budgets.

**Mr Speaker**: I am extremely grateful to the Minister and to all colleagues who have taken part in this set of exchanges.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In answering a question from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), the Minister for Women and Equalities indicated that same-sex marriage is in her “in-tray.” The normal understanding of a Minister’s in-tray would be that action is about to follow. Given that both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have repeatedly said that the issue is a matter for devolution to decide, I hope that at some very early stage, if not now, the Minister for Women and Equalities will return to the Dispatch Box to reconcile that oversight.

**Mr Speaker**: The Minister is indicating a desire to say something now, and I think the House is all agog.

**Penny Mordaunt** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am happy to clarify the position for the hon. Gentleman. The issue he refers to is in my in-tray. A huge number of letters are written to me every week on it, so that qualifies it as an issue in my tray. I am not bringing forward any legislation on this matter. On this and other issues that are for Northern Ireland and its people to decide, I have stood at this Dispatch Box and urged Members and Members of the Legislative Assembly to come together to represent the people who want answers to these questions. I also remind him that on equal marriage and on other matters there are private Members’ Bills in this place and the other place to address those concerns. If he wants, as I do, Northern Ireland to resolve these matters one way or the other, we must do everything we can to ensure that those political representatives are able to do that. This House has said that it wishes to resolve this issue and many others if Northern Ireland does not—that is the position. He has my assurance that I will not be bringing forward any measures to address this. The Northern Ireland Office is clearly leading on it, but these matters are in my in-tray because I have to respond to people in Northern Ireland who want action and want to be listened to.

Counter-Daesh Update

2.1 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence** (Gavin Williamson): When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development updated the House earlier this year, she was able to confirm that Daesh has lost control of almost all the territory it once held in Iraq and Syria. Today, I can tell the House that it is now confined to small pockets on the Iraq-Syria border, where it faces daily attacks from coalition forces on the ground and in the air, including from our own Royal Air Force. In Syria, the Syrian Democratic Forces, supported by coalition air power, are continuing their campaign. This involves the clearance of desert areas, securing the Syria-Iraq border and rooting out the remaining several hundred terrorists who are in outposts in the Euphrates valley and surrounding areas.

**Mr Speaker**: What a very rum business that is.

**Gavin Williamson**: It was an intervention, but I do apologise for it. It is rare that one is heckled by one’s own mobile phone, but on this occasion we have a new parliamentary convention, without a doubt. If I may, Mr Speaker, I will proceed, without the help and support of Siri.

There remains work to be done, but that should not stop us from acknowledging the huge achievements of the past year. With the liberation of its people from Daesh, a new chapter in Iraq’s proud history has opened, and we should be proud of the role that the United Kingdom has played. We have provided close air support to Iraqi forces, as part of the coalition, launching 1,370 air strikes since 2014. We have trained 75,000 Iraqi security personnel, including the Peshmerga, and, for the first time, our cyber-operations have played a significant role in destroying Daesh’s online capabilities. In addition, we have given more than £237 million in humanitarian support and more than £30 million in stabilisation funding to assist in Iraq’s recovery from Daesh. But having visited Iraq at the beginning of the year and seen the extraordinary efforts of our armed forces, I know they have also done something more: given a proud nation hope of getting back on its feet. The elections in Iraq on 12 May were a major milestone in Iraq’s recovery on the road to reconciliation and peace and in bringing the nation together.

The final results are yet to be announced, but we look forward to working with the new Government once they are formed. Although the election was largely peaceful, there have been concerns about alleged electoral problems, and the Iraqi state must ensure that a thorough and transparent investigation is carried out into all such incidents. But as the Iraqis look to rebuild their country, the international community can do much to set the conditions for a more peaceful Iraq. Earlier this year, Kuwait hosted the reconstruction conference, which raised $30 billion in pledges to help Iraq. Now global partners must deliver on their commitments.

The UK is determined to play its part, so last December, the Prime Minister and Iraqi Prime Minister Abadi announced that our security co-operation would be enduring. We are offering support in a range of areas, whether through the coalition, through the central Iraqi...
national security institutions, or through partnership and investment to transform the Iraqi military. Back in January, I signed a statement of intent with the Iraqi Defence Minister that will see us countering the forces that continue to wish to destabilise Iraq and building on our co-operation to counter terrorism. But stabilising Iraq will require a good deal more than rooting out the remnants of Daesh. It will be about reconstructing Mosul and other affected areas, about revitalising Iraq’s economy and reconciling communities, and about supporting people as they get their lives back on track. Of course, those are things that only Iraqis can do and lead on, but we stand ready to help whenever they ask.

From Iraq, I now turn to Syria. Tragically, the conflict in Syria is entering its eighth year, but with our military playing a role second only to the United States, Daesh’s defeat is now at hand. We are doing all we can to alleviate the unimaginable suffering experienced by the Syrian people. We are doing all we can to ensure that they understand that the British people stand by side by side with them. We have committed £2.71 billion of aid—our largest ever response to a single humanitarian crisis. Since 2012, across Syria and the region, we have provided more than 27 million food rations, more than 12 million medical consultations, more than 10 million relief packages and more than 10 million vaccinations. Following the liberation of Raqqa, we have provided an additional £10 million to north-eastern Syria to support de-mining and to help to meet the needs of displaced people with water, shelter and cooking equipment. We have also helped to re-stock health facilities with medicines and equipment.

However, as long as the old grievances that gave rise to Daesh are allowed to fester, this long-running conflict will remain unresolved. Ultimately, the only solution is a lasting political settlement and the end of the suffering of the Syrian people. The UN-led Geneva process, which is mandated by UN Security Council resolution 2254, remains the best forum for a political solution to this conflict. That is why the UN efforts have our full and continuing support.

Thanks to the courage of our forces and our partners on the ground, Daesh’s final territorial defeat is now at hand, but the battle against the poison of Daesh is not quite over. Instead, we are entering a new phase, as the terrorists change their approach, disperse and prepare for a potential insurgency. In Iraq, Daesh cells exist in Mosul, Hawija, Diyala, Anbar and Baghdad, from where they will attempt to grow once more, sowing the seeds of instability and undermining faith in the country’s Government’s ability to deliver security.

More widely, Daesh remains the most significant terrorist threat to the United Kingdom because of its ability to inspire, direct and enable attacks on our interests. That is why we continue to work through the global coalition to eliminate the danger that Daesh poses, and it is why the British people can rest assured that the Government will continue to do everything in our power to protect them by dealing with the threat at source in Iraq and Syria. We can keep that threat away from our shores by making sure that we are involved in counter-insurgency work with the Iraqi Government and with our allies in Syria.

Let us not forget that we have made enormous advances since the dark days when Daesh was close to the gates of Baghdad. Today, its black flags lie in tatters. As long as we maintain the same resolve, the same determination and the same unity with our partners, we can be confident that Daesh’s days are numbered.

2.10 pm  

*Nia Griffith* (Llanelli) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it.

The Opposition welcome the extraordinary progress that has been made in the campaign against Daesh. This evil organisation and its poisonous ideology must be defeated wherever they emerge. We pay tribute to our UK servicemen and women, whose courage and commitment is hastening the demise of Daesh, and we pay tribute to our allies and partners on the ground, who have sustained such heavy losses while liberating their peoples from the scourge of this terrorist group.

Following the success of the operation to liberate Mosul and much of Anbar province, the Iraqi Government are now focused on securing the border with Syria to ensure that fighters cannot return. Will the Secretary of State outline in greater detail the support that the UK is providing to that effort?

The campaign against Daesh has inevitably caused very substantial damage to infrastructure in Iraq and Syria. Homes, schools and hospitals have been destroyed, as has much of the fabric of governance. The World Bank has estimated that the overall cost of reconstruction and recovery in Iraq alone is more than $88 billion. Will the Secretary of State say more about the UK’s role in not only the reconstruction but the stabilisation of the areas affected?

Daesh fighters have carried out crimes of unspeakable barbarity. Many have been captured and are now in the custody of the Iraqi Government and other authorities in the region. Will the Secretary of State outline what action is being taken to prosecute them for their crimes and what monitoring there is of fighters and their families who may seek to return to the UK?

The global coalition against Daesh is engaged in degrading and defeating the organisation by tackling its finances. That is key to ensuring that Daesh does not simply reappear elsewhere or in another form. The loss of territory in the region has also precipitated a loss of assets and oil revenue, but what further steps is the UK taking to combat the funding of Daesh? As the organisation becomes vastly diminished as a territorial force, what work is being done, alongside internet companies and social media providers, to combat the online spread of Daesh’s vile propaganda?

As the civil war in Syria has entered its eighth year, will the Secretary of State say what steps are being taken to achieve a ceasefire and a lasting political solution? As the UN-sponsored Geneva peace process has stalled, what effort is being made to co-ordinate that process with the discussions in Sochi and Astana?

The campaign to defeat Daesh has made significant progress in liberating territory, but we know that operations continue on a daily basis, as does the vital training that we provide to forces on the ground. That is down to the extraordinary commitment of our personnel and that of our allies. No one who serves in our armed forces does so for medals or acclaim but, particularly in the RAF’s centenary year, I know that the whole House wants to see our personnel being commended for their bravery. The Ministry of Defence has been examining
the criteria for awarding a medal to those serving on Operation Shader. Will the Secretary of State provide an update on that work so that we can ensure that the bravery and dedication of our personnel is recognised properly and without delay?

Gavin Williamson: I thank the hon. Lady for her continued support for our armed forces as they continue to be involved in this important operation.

Our commitment in respect of a training mission to Iraq and the need to ensure that we do everything we can to ensure stability in the region was underlined by our recent visits to Iraq and meetings with the Iraqi Prime Minister and Defence Minister. We will continue to do everything that we can to train Iraqi forces to ensure that Iraq’s border forces are in the very best position to deal with some of the threats and challenges. We are also looking into how we can do more with Jordanian forces. On top of that, we have committed to providing more than £30 million of support for UN stabilisation efforts. That makes it clear that Britain is a long-term ally of our Iraqi friends.

We are the second largest bilateral donor in Syria. We have consistently been the country leading the way in making sure that humanitarian support gets through, and we will continue to do that on top of the funding and support that we have been giving to Iraq.

The hon. Lady made an important point about the funding of Daesh, which the Government take exceptionally seriously. We talk about the dispersal of Daesh in Iraq and Syria, but the challenge is actually much wider, with Daesh dispersing much more globally. We need to look carefully at the financial flows that follow these people and that provide support for the acts of violence they wish to perpetrate in the countries to which they go.

The hon. Lady’s point about countering propaganda is vital. For the first time, the United Kingdom has been incredibly active with an offensive cyber-capacity to deal with, correct and address that propaganda. We have seen a 70% reduction in the amount of propaganda coming out of Daesh, so our work is really showing results. We cannot rest on our laurels, however, and we will continue to look at the issue and drive down that propaganda, because we do not want to see any of Daesh’s vile hatred on the internet at all.

On the hon. Lady’s final point about a medal for those who have served in Op Shader, I have been incredibly touched by the commitment and dedication that all our service personnel have shown in the operation, and by the sacrifices that they have made to keep Britain safe—I know that the hon. Lady has, too. We are looking closely at medallic recognition. Ultimately, we hope to try to find a solution that ensures that all service personnel who have been involved in the campaign get the recognition that they deserve. As the hon. Lady knows, we are looking to try to land the support of all members of the cross-Government Committee.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that our principal allies on the ground in Syria have been Kurdish-led? Does he share my concern that, having helped to suppress and eliminate Daesh in Syria, those Kurdish-led forces may now find themselves under attack by Turkey, a country with an ambivalent record toward both Islamist extremism on the one hand and Russia on the other? What will we do if we find that our Kurdish allies are attacked by our so-called NATO ally?

Gavin Williamson: We have worked incredibly closely with the Syrian defence forces over a period of time, as have other coalition allies. We are working closely with the United States and France to get a dialogue going between the Syrian defence forces and Turkey to ensure that there is no conflict of the form that my right hon. Friend suggests.¹

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the statement and of course, in the first instance, welcome the progress being made towards the eradication of what is a most despicable and cowardly terrorist organisation. I commend those Members of the armed forces who have been a part of that. However, it is imperative that the House is given a clear idea of what the Secretary of State sees as UK strategy in the region, especially if we are not to repeat the mistakes that allowed the vacuum from which Daesh emerged to be recreated elsewhere.

As the Secretary of State mentioned, following the damage wrought by Daesh in Iraq, the Iraqi Government asked the international community for some $88 billion, yet, at February’s conference for the reconstruction of Iraq in Kuwait, less than half that figure was raised. SNP Members are fully supportive of the £2.71 billion of aid that the Government have already provided, but I am sure that the Secretary of State will agree that others will need to step up as well. Does he accept that failing to invest adequately in reconstruction risks allowing Daesh back in through the back door?

On a broader point, the Secretary of State spoke about the number of forces who are deployed to fight against Daesh, but what he neglected to mention was that many of those will be special forces whose operational assignments almost always escape adequate scrutiny from the House. Can he tell us, therefore, how the House can hold the Government to account in future when so many of the day-to-day operations are carried out in this way? Finally, given the emerging case of Daesh using drone technology, what actions are the Government taking to counter that not only in the battle zone, but in the possible use by Daesh outside of it?

Gavin Williamson: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government do not comment on the activity of special forces, but we are absolutely committed to keeping this House regularly updated on our operations in Iraq and Syria. He talks about the recovery in the region and touches on what the Iraqi Government were looking for with regard to support. The international community has come forward with $30 billion-worth of support. It is vital that the British Government do all they can to encourage that support to come forward swiftly, so that the Iraqi people get the benefit of it. We are starting to see some very positive signs in the Iraqi economy, with a recovery and increased private sector investment, and that is the true driver to Iraq’s future. We should not underestimate the amount of oil wealth in Iraq in

ensuring that we do all we can to help the Iraqi Government to benefit from that wealth and, more importantly, that the people of Iraq benefit from that wealth, too.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What estimate has the Secretary of State made of the number of Daesh fighters who have got away, got back and are at large in the United Kingdom?

Gavin Williamson: The Government continue to keep a close eye on all those people who are travelling from the region through other third countries with the intention of returning to the United Kingdom. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will also appreciate that the Government keep a very close eye as to the activity and the movements of such people.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): What steps is the Secretary of State’s Department taking to counter those in Daesh, al-Qaeda and their affiliates who are now creating chaos across the swathe of sub-Saharan Africa, forcing much of the people movement towards the Mediterranean and on to our shores? What are we going to do there to again destroy Daesh?

Gavin Williamson: I am sure that the hon. Lady is very aware of the work that we have already announced, working with our partners, the French, as well as many other NATO countries, on dealing with the increasing problem of Daesh in the sub-Saharan region and with how it could migrate into Europe. We will continue to work very closely with the French and other NATO partners. The Government continue to look at how we can work more closely with other countries, such as Nigeria and Libya, to ensure that we do not see this migration of terror and the spread of Daesh into ungoverned areas.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): My right hon. Friend has already stated that the enemy is now in an enclave on the Iraq-Syrian border, presumably penned there by Syrian forces, Iraqi security forces and the Peshmergas. What happens to people, enemies, who are either captured whole or wounded? Are we ensuring that they are penned away and cannot hurt our country in future?

Gavin Williamson: I can assure my hon. Friend that that is the case. The Syrian democratic forces are playing a key role in that in terms of the detention of such people.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State update the House on the Syrian assault on the province of Daraa, in which some 750,000 civilians are now creating chaos across the swathe of sub-Saharan Africa, forcing much of the people movement towards the Mediterranean and on to our shores? What are we going to do there to again destroy Daesh?

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): It is welcome news that 98% of territory once held by Daesh has now been surrendered. May I welcome the Secretary of State’s recent visit to RAF Cosford in my constituency? Would he like to put on record his tribute to the Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering at RAF Cosford? Without engineers, our pilots cannot fly. In this, the 100th year of the RAF, will he pay a special tribute to the 100-year history of that station in my constituency?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the important role of the Royal Air Force in our continued campaign. The Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering at RAF Cosford is an important part of that, training not just British service personnel, but service personnel of many other nations. It has done an amazing job in supporting the RAF over its very long and distinguished history. I say a big thank you to everyone in the Royal Air Force, which has not been more active than it has been in its 100th year. It has flown constant operations over the past few years, making sure that Britain remains safe.

Phil Wilson (Sedgefield) (Lab): The RAF has played a major role, and still does, in ensuring that something like 7 million civilians in Iraq and Syria are no longer under the shadow of Daesh, and we can be proud of the role it has played. We know how meticulous the RAF is in avoiding civilian casualties, and any allegation of civilian harm is, and should be, properly investigated, but how do we counter allegations by some organisations, such as Amnesty International, that there have actually been hundreds of civilians who have been killed by the RAF?

Gavin Williamson: We have always made it clear to this House that we investigate the issue of civilian casualties and that we do everything we can to avoid civilian casualties. We investigate it very closely and we have committed to reporting to this House immediately should it come to light that there has been a civilian casualty, which, of course, we did earlier this year.

I must say that I was deeply, deeply disappointed by the Amnesty International report, which was not only disappointing, but disgraceful. We have always been very open about the strikes that we have made. Amnesty International decided to issue this report. It contacted the Ministry of Defence, but, within 24 hours, without the ability for us to go back and explain, all its allegations were unfounded; RAF flights had not even been involved. It did not give us the opportunity to correct such a damaging and disgraceful report. We have written to Amnesty International and invited its representatives to the Ministry of Defence to discuss the matter. If it is going to produce reports, we want them to be accurate. We certainly do not want them to be calling into question the amazing professionalism of our Royal Air Force.
James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in congratulating our armed forces on the startling progress that they have made in Iraq and Syria. If we want to be able to do the same in the future, we must maintain capacity for peer-on-peer warfighting and expeditionary counter-insurgency, as well as meeting emerging threats in space, beneath the oceans and online. Does the Secretary of State agree that only nations with tier 1 military capabilities can confidently pursue their national interests against any enemy in any theatre, and that that is what the UK must continue to want to do?

Gavin Williamson: We have always been at the very top tier of military power and the ability to field military force, and I have no doubt that this nation will continue to be so long into the future.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. He is right and pragmatic to recognise that while Daesh is on the run it will move, change tactics, and try to regrow and emerge again. Is the Secretary of State aware that one of the outworkings of the Northern Ireland experience is that we have great knowledge in counter-terrorism? Companies from Northern Ireland are involved in Afghanistan, Libya and Tunisia, and their expertise could also be useful elsewhere.

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about using the expertise and knowledge of British business—including businesses from Northern Ireland—in our fight against Daesh. We also need to look imaginatively at how we are spending our aid budget to ensure that British businesses benefit. We are spending more than £2 billion in the area, so it would be great to see more British companies benefiting from that spend and using their unique expertise to benefit the people of Iraq and Syria.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): As part of the armed forces parliamentary scheme, I have been fortunate to meet many men and women who have participated in Op Shader and our counter-Daesh activities overall. How many such men and women do we need to thank for their service and their sacrifice—often being away from their families for months at a time?

Gavin Williamson: There are 1,400 deployed, including 600 in Iraq, but the total number who have been on orientation is considerably higher. We need to recognise the amazing contribution that these forces have made—not only those who have been in Iraq or flying over Iraq and Syria, but the whole tail of people who have been doing the work and putting in the effort to ensure that the RAF has been able to make the flights and strike at the heart of those who wish to do us harm.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): Further to the question of the right hon. Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), I want to press the Defence Secretary on the issue of those returning to the UK who are not currently on the security list. What efforts have been made, in conjunction with Border Force, to monitor the people we have no knowledge of?

Gavin Williamson: Well, it is obviously difficult to monitor people we have no knowledge of. We are obviously working closely with the security services and allies in the region, whether it be Turkey or Iraq, and working closely with the SDF to keep close tabs on what Daesh fighters are doing. We are seeing a large number of Daesh fighters not actually returning to the United Kingdom, but also going to different countries such as Afghanistan and Libya. We keep coming back to the point that, although we are making great progress in Iraq and Syria, the threat is changing and moving to different countries. We have to be aware that the fight continues against the evil hatred in these people’s hearts, and we have to do everything we can to stop them.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): Daesh is a dangerous ideology in cyber-space as much as it is a physical threat on the battlefield. Will my right hon. Friend join me in acknowledging the work of the intelligence agencies, including GCHQ in my constituency, in dismantling that power base online, and will he update the House as to what steps are being taken to expunge what remains?

Gavin Williamson: As I touched on earlier, we are already using our abilities in the cyber-security field to counter the Daesh threat. We can only do that by working hand in glove with GCHQ—its amazing work and the technology it has developed—and with defence intelligence. We will continue to do that and to invest in this capability. An awful lot of extra investment has gone into this field from the Ministry of Defence and GCHQ, but we cannot be complacent. Although we have seen a significant, 70% reduction in the amount of propaganda that has been put out by Daesh, we saw a slight uptick as a result of the SDF shifting away from the fight in the middle Euphrates valley. Now that the fight has returned to that area, we are again seeing a reduction in the amount of online activity. These two things do not sit separately; it is about kinetic force, as well as cyber-force.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I think that the previous question got to the heart of something that is of great interest to this House. First, will the Secretary of State reassure me that the intelligence contacts that have been made with Iraqi intelligence will be developed and built on? I am sure that he will agree to that. Secondly, will he perhaps go a little further and outline how the experience of counteracting the cyber-war will benefit our intelligence services during the years and decades to come?

Gavin Williamson: I can give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. For the first time we saw a terrorist group that created a state around it and that effectively used the internet as a tool to bring terror to the streets of many European and world cities. We have learnt an awful lot in countering that. As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), we have to keep investing in technology, experience and the people who are best able to counter the threat, and the Government are completely committed to doing that.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State will be aware of reports of a number of private conversations and correspondence between himself and the Prime Minister that have been leaked to the press. Can he shed any light on how these have come into the public domain? Has he instituted a leak inquiry? If so, who will be leading on it and when will it report its findings to the House?
Gavin Williamson: I was waiting for a question about Daesh, and our operations in Iraq and Syria.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): Is not one of the major problems we face that Daesh is an ideology, not a country? Therefore, when it is defeated in one geographical location, it can morph and develop in another location, as we are seeing on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Daesh has extensive control of that eastern border, Libya and the sub-Saharan region. There is ultimately no military solution to the problem we face, unless we are to accept the situation of permanent war. We therefore need to concentrate on counter-radicalisation strategies. When we are involved in military activity in the middle east and Africa, the problem is that it feeds the fuel that drives Daesh.

Gavin Williamson: That is why we have put so much effort and resource into counter-radicalisation strategies, and into dealing with the threat in cyber-space as well as the physical threat. Behind those computers are individuals who have experience of fighting and spreading hate. That is why we have to deprive them of the territory in which they have been able to operate and do everything we can to deprive them of their ability to operate freely, and that is what our armed forces have been so successful in doing.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): The Kurdish people fought with some of the most bravery and effect to defend their local populations against the cruelties of Daesh. What are the UK Government now doing to protect the Kurdish people of Iraq and Syria from being attacked by the Governments of those two countries and, indeed, by the Government of Turkey?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work very closely with, especially, the Iraqi Government and the Turkish Government to make sure that we have sensible and pragmatic solutions. We have always had a very strong relationship with the Kurds, especially in Afghanistan. We have a very good relationship with the SDF, which is both Kurdish and Arab. We will continue to work to try to ensure, especially in Syria, that the SDF is an integral part of the solution for that country going forward.1

Point of Order

2.39 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just want to ensure that the record of the House is correct in relation to last week’s debate on the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill. During that debate, I referred to an incident, as reported in column 840 of Hansard:

“Many people will remember what happened a couple of years ago when a huge tailback occurred at Dover. Apparently, it was triggered by two French police officers based in Dover not turning up for their shift, and that led to a 15-mile tailback.”

I was subsequently intervened on a couple of times by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones), who, in his second intervention, said:

“The causes were very clear... The right hon. Gentleman”—that is, me—“is just plain wrong.”—[Official Report, 26 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 840-842.]

I went back to the port of Dover to confirm that the incident that I referred to was indeed caused by an absence of French police officers, or a small number of French police officers being present. The hon. Gentleman may have suggested, perhaps inadvertently, that I was “plain wrong” in describing that incident, but the port of Dover has confirmed that I was plain right in the way that I described it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of this matter. He has put his views very clearly on the record. Of course, if the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) feels that he has been inaccurate, it is open to him to correct the record. I suspect that there may be a difference of opinion—Members often do have different points of view—but, as I say, the right hon. Gentleman has put his views on the record.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I obviously would not in any way wish to mislead the House or correct a Member inaccurately, so I went back and checked the press report. The headline at the time was, “MyFerryLink workers walked out on Monday over the sale of the company’s ferries”, resulting in the strike closing the port of Calais. The right hon. Gentleman’s belief in the efficacy of the French police is magnificent, but it was quite clear what the press thought the cause of the problem was, and that was also agreed on by the British and French Governments. So can we perhaps just say that this exchange has indeed corrected the record all round?

Madam Deputy Speaker: As I suspected, there is a difference of opinion here. No doubt, these discussions will continue, but I think that both the right hon. Gentlemen and the hon. Gentleman have put their points of view on the record, so the best thing for us to do—

Tom Brake: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I do not think there is anything more to be said on this matter at this stage, and I would now like to move on.

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Pets (Theft)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.43 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I beg to move.

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006 to make the theft of pets an offence; to apply certain post-conviction powers under those Acts to such an offence; and for connected purposes.

Yesterday, I joined many hon. Members from across the House to support the petition, signed by over 100,000 people across the country and by 69 people in my own constituency, calling for pet theft to be made a criminal offence in its own right. I pay tribute to Dr Daniel Allen for starting the petition and to all the campaigners who have worked tirelessly on this issue, such as SAMP— the Stolen And Missing Pets Alliance—and Pet Theft Awareness. Dr Allen has said that he started the petition because, as a dog owner, he finds the thought of someone taking his dog “unbearable”.

When I am asked what is the most difficult part of my job as an MP, I always answer, “Monday mornings.” That is not because I have to roll out of my bed to catch a 7.15 am flight, but because every Monday morning it breaks my heart to leave my Jack Russell cross Yorkshire terrier, Poppy. The fact that she knows I am leaving, and does her utmost to make me feel guilty about it, just makes heading to London so much harder. I could not imagine returning home to find that Poppy was not there. I do not even want to contemplate the notion of her being stolen. For me, just like the millions of pet owners across the UK, Poppy is my family. To be honest, I am like a proud dad. She has her moments, like every other teenager, and she can be restless with her ball and her duckie, but I love her to bits and I would hate it if anything happened to her.

During yesterday’s debate, hon. Members gave very personal and moving accounts of the real emotional harm caused by pet theft and talked of the lasting damage it can cause to a family—more so than the theft of an inanimate object of the same sort of financial value. As Dawn Maw—who spent thousands of pounds, took an extended period off work and suffered the breakdown of her marriage after her dog, Angel, was stolen in 2013—has said, “losing Angel was like losing my life.”

Or consider the case of Kieren Hamilton, who was stabbed 40 times in a burglary in which his dog, Rambo, was stolen. According to his mother, he just wants his dog back. There is also the case of Rita and Philip Potter, whose Labrador, Daisy, vanished from their own back garden in Norfolk eight months ago. Rita says that Daisy was such “a beautiful dog, she was a wonderful companion. We have got seven grandchildren, and they all miss her so much. At Christmas time, our little granddaughter, who is just five years old, said all she wanted for Christmas was Daisy back home.”

As it stands, the law does not properly recognise the real harm that pet theft can cause, because pets are not inherently treated differently from inanimate objects. In England and Wales, sentencing guidelines are based primarily on the financial value of the possession, whether a mobile phone, a TV, or a beloved family pet. When Dawn Maw, who described Angel as her “best friend,” said that “my phone might have cost the same as Angel, but could have been replaced within 24 hours”, she got to the heart of the absurdity of this situation. Victims of pet theft have not just lost a financial asset; they have lost a much-loved member of the family. Pet theft can be a truly devastating and distressing experience. Losing a pet can tear the heart out of a family—and that is what the law should, but does not, recognise.

This situation has also led to light-touch sentences for pet thieves who have wreaked havoc on victims’ lives. In England and Wales, the theft of a dog valued at less than £500 can only be classed as a category 1 or 2 offence, which invariably means a slap on the wrist. A slap on the wrist for pet thieves is a slap in the face for victims of pet theft. What is more, it is failing to act as a deterrent. Even after Sentencing Council reforms in 2016, most cases of pet theft do not go to court, most pet thieves are walking free and, unsurprisingly, pet theft is still very much on the rise.

The situation in Scotland is not much better. Pet theft is not an offence in its own right in Scotland either, and since the Scottish Sentencing Council has no guidelines for theft, judges rely on past precedent when deciding on sentencing. This offers more flexibility, but that can cut both ways—and sentences are not required to accurately reflect the emotional harm caused to the victim.

So change is needed across the United Kingdom. A change in the law is necessary to deliver justice for victims of pet theft and to give more peace of mind to the 12 million UK households with a pet. This Bill will create a new, separate criminal offence, in its own right, of pet theft, recognising the self-evident fact that the theft of a living, sentient being is in a whole different category to the theft of an inanimate object. We are talking about the abduction of an animal—of what most pet owners would consider a central part of their family. It is a crime that is either more thoughtless or more malicious—or both—than the theft of an inanimate possession.

The Bill will also require that sentencing is appropriate to the level of emotional harm caused by the theft, recognising that for victims of pet theft, it is the emotional loss, not the financial loss, that really matters. After all, today a growing number of companies offer bereavement leave for employees who have lost a pet. If we can give due recognition to the emotional effects of the loss of a pet in other walks of life, why can we not do a better job of it in the courts?

My intention is that this Bill would effect the necessary changes across Great Britain—in England and Wales, but also in Scotland. The law on this is flawed in both jurisdictions, and it is deeply important for me, as a Scottish MP, that pet owners in Aberdeen get as much support from the criminal justice system as pet owners in Abingdon or Aberavon. Scotland must not be left behind. My Bill seeks to amend a UK Act, and as such, it would apply to Scotland as well as England and Wales, but the provisions affecting Scotland would require a legislative consent motion in the Scottish Parliament. That happens on a near daily basis in Holyrood. I hope to work with the Scottish Parliament, and in particular my Scottish Conservative colleague Maurice Golden...
MSP, to get legislative consent in Holyrood for the Bill, so that pet thieves all over Great Britain face real justice. This is an opportunity for Holyrood and Westminster to work together for positive change.

It is great that animal welfare has come to the forefront of the political agenda across the UK, and I would like to applaud the UK Government for their progress on this issue. Having campaigned for a ban on electric shock collars for dogs, I am particularly pleased at the action being taken in that area. However, we must ensure that this progress on animal welfare extends to ensuring that pets and their owners are protected against pet theft by laws and sentencing guidelines that are tough enough to act as a real deterrent. Likewise, we must ensure that victims of pet theft can have faith in the criminal justice system.

This Bill is not the end of that effort. For example, we need Police Scotland and the police services in England and Wales to redouble their efforts to catch pet thieves and reunite stolen pets with their owners. I firmly believe that legislation recognising the seriousness of this offence and recognising it as distinct from the theft of inanimate objects would be a first and major step towards changing the way we deal with pet theft in this country. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,


Ross Thomson accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 240).

**Estimates Day**

**[4th Allotted Day]**

**Department for Education**

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Department for Education:

1. further resources, not exceeding £34,065,501,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,

2. further resources, not exceeding £14,429,588,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

3. a further sum, not exceeding £46,841,694,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(Andrew Stephenson.)

2.53 pm

**Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): It is a pleasure to open this debate on the spending of the Department for Education in my capacity as Chair of the Select Committee on Education. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for allowing the debate and particularly my colleagues on the Committee who are here in the Chamber for all the work they do alongside the Committee officials.

If we regard the NHS as the guardian of our health, we should regard education as the guardian of our future. Almost every citizen is affected by education. I welcome the positive announcements made by the Department recently, and there certainly seems to be no lack of initiatives from within the Sanctuary Buildings. However, I have some concerns that, across the Department’s remit, funding might be too atomised to be coherent and effective. There is an initiative here and an initiative there.

I am concerned that the Department’s estimate is not strategic enough to deliver the outcomes we need. Let me take, for example, the recent announcement on grammar schools. I am not against grammar schools—I believe in parental choice—but I am not sure why spending up to £200 million over the next two years on expanding grammar schools is more important than spending £200 million on looking after the most vulnerable pupils. We could look after hundreds of thousands of vulnerable pupils with tuition for 12 weeks a year and transform their life opportunities.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Surely we have to do both. Expanding grammar schools provides opportunities, and this expansion will particularly target those from disadvantaged backgrounds, which is a great idea in support of it, but we also need to do what my right hon. Friend says for other children. I hope that he, like me, would welcome more rapid progress on better and fairer funding for all our schools, because it is still very low in areas such as mine.

**Robert Halfon**: As I said, I am not against grammar schools, but the problem is whether they are providing opportunities for the most disadvantaged pupils. Only 3% of pupils in grammar schools get free school meals, and I would rather the Government increase that proportion of pupils before giving grammar schools extra funding. That extra £200 million of funding will benefit only a few thousand pupils, but I have shown how it could
benefit a lot more. I have huge respect for my right hon. Friend. He often campaigns for more funding in his constituency, but it is because such funding has been spent in this way that schools in his area and others do not get as much money as they need.

Mr Tammanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): The Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that in the last two years, funding per pupil fell by just over 4%, at a time when other costs have increased. The recent reallocation to school funding from other budgets still leaves schools in my constituency worse off by more than £300 per pupil, something about which a great many parents and teachers have written to me in recent weeks. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we need to see new funding, so that our schools can improve standards and our pupils can reach their full potential?

Robert Halfon: While I accept that funding is much higher than it was in 2010—no doubt the Minister for School Standards will set that out—I also agree that there are increasing cost pressures, but I will make that argument in a moment.

I am full of admiration for my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary, who has successfully made the case for a longer-term vision for health and social care. I am convinced that his longevity has been a significant contributing factor and can only regret the fact that we have had a higher turnover in Education Secretaries in recent years. However, I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Hampshire (Damian Hinds) will, given the opportunity, prove to be an advocate for the public services that his Department oversees and funds.

Without wanting to stretch the scope of the debate too far, I would like to talk a little about the financial health of the school system, of nurseries and of further education and skills. While all the evidence tells us that over the long term, in comparison with relevant international comparators, schools in England are relatively well funded, it is unarguably the case that rising cost pressures have not been matched by the sort of investment that would allow them to be met without impacting upon the quality and delivery of education in our schools. My right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening) was absolutely right last autumn to redirect £1.3 billion of public funds from her own Department’s budget to the frontline and raise the so-called floor in the national funding formula.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Despite what the right hon. Gentleman says about the Government’s claim to have put £1.5 billion back into the system through the new formula, I have gone around schools in Coventry, and they are still just under £300 per head short—in other words, they are still facing cuts. He talks about further education, which has seen cuts of about 27%. How does that affect the quality of apprenticeships, for example?

Robert Halfon: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will come on to those points later, and if he does not feel that I have responded to them, I would be happy for him to intervene again.

In truth, the £1.3 billion should never have been necessary. While the introduction of a national funding formula is an entirely logical and necessary process of structural reform, for many schools the question is one of sufficiency just as much as of equity. The concept of fair funding may, I fear, be just too subjective to be delivered, so I want to see a change in the debate in this Chamber and elsewhere about school funding. The two supposedly competing accounts—one from the Conservative side of the House about record levels of overall investment going into schools, and the counter-argument that schools face real-terms reductions in per pupil funding—are both true, partly because there are simply more pupils in the system. We badly need to accept that reality, and move towards a practical solution not just for schools, but for further education, which has, without any sense or logic, been chronically underfunded for many years.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I strongly support the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making. Do not the Government figures released last week—an extra 137,000 pupils in England’s schools, but a loss of 5,400 teachers and almost 3,000 teaching assistants—further underline and support his point about the insufficiency of the total quantum going into schools budgets every year?

Robert Halfon: I think those are mixed figures, because if we look at this in the round, the number of teachers has gone up by a significant amount since 2010. Again, this is part of the argument I have been making.

Such arguments are why the Education Committee has launched an inquiry into school and college funding. We have no intention of unpicking the huge public consultation on the national funding formula or its sister consultation on high needs, but we must talk about the long-term sustainability of education. This is about delivering the outcomes we need as a nation and how we can move towards a longer-term vision, with a 10-year plan coupled with a future-proof five-year funding settlement.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way. Does he accept—I hope the Education Committee will look at this—that there are particular problems with the national funding formula for special schools? Those schools are hit in two ways. First, the special schools budget has been conflated with the overall budget, which is causing some difficulties. Secondly, they are also taking students with much more profound difficulties, for which they are not necessarily being funded in the way they need to be. Will he look into that?

Robert Halfon: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We are doing a separate inquiry into children with special educational needs and disabilities, which I hope will reflect the issues he has raised.

We began our inquiry on 19 June, with a scene-setting session featuring the National Foundation for Educational Research, the Education Policy Institute and Institute for Fiscal Studies. In our future sessions, we will be hearing directly from teachers, governors and parents about the way forward, and seeking to strengthen the Department’s hand as it enters negotiations with the Treasury in the spending review.
One important matter is how public money actually reaches schools. Part of the original motivation of a national formula was to bypass the various byzantine means by which local authorities disbursed funds to schools. This is sensible, but there is a problem concerning the role of multi-academy trusts in top-slicing and allocating money received from the DFE, a matter on which my Committee colleague, the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), has tabled a number of parliamentary questions.

According to the Education Policy Institute, there is little measurable difference between the performance of schools in MATs and those in local authorities. There is good and bad to be found in both, and we must not let the reforms of the past eight years or so be lost through a failure to attack underperformance in academy trusts, as has occurred in a number of high-profile cases recently, including WCAT—the Wakefield City Academies Trust—and Bright Tribe. Having said that, I recognise that there are many good and outstanding academy schools and the difference they have made to the lives of thousands of pupils.

I wish to add that the £1.3 billion top-up was an Elastoplast solution, as it were, for a longer-term problem that could become serious if not seen to. Members on both sides of the House will share my commitment to tackling social injustices—that is the aim of our Select Committee—and one of the most profound challenges we face on that front is the so-called attainment gap between the educational outcomes of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and those of their better-off peers. I appreciate that the Minister for School Standards and the Education Secretary have made progress on this, but it has been at quite a slow rate.

The Government and their predecessors have shown their commitment to tackling educational disadvantage through using the pupil premium to enable schools to provide additional support and opportunities to the children who deserve and need it most, but however well-intentioned and generously resourced the pupil premium is, it is not without its flaws. The first flaw is that schools are increasingly dipping into their pupil premium money to shore up their overall budget. This is most unlikely to be a measure of first resort, as it involves simultaneously further disadvantaging already disadvantaged pupils. There is also the ethical problem of publishing information about how pupil premium money is spent while knowingly doing something else with it.

The second flaw is that many children eligible for the pupil premium fail to receive it because they are not registered to receive free school meals. I understand that this figure could be as high as 200,000. This can happen because parents are unaware or unwilling to make a claim, perhaps in some areas through a sense of social stigma.

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Robert Halfon: I will give way for the last time, because I know you want me to get on, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Emma Hardy: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the whole pupil premium system needs to be reviewed in order to look at children facing bereavement and at different eligible—elig—

[Interrupted.] I will get there in the end.

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): You obviously need to work on that.

Emma Hardy: I obviously do. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we need to look at different criteria—I will go with that word—for children qualifying for the pupil premium?

Robert Halfon: The hon. Lady makes an important point. I passionately support the pupil premium—it was a great reform by the Government—but we need to make sure that all children who should be entitled to it get it. We need to look at suggestions like the one made by the hon. Lady.

The third flaw is that the pupil premium may not be effective enough. At current rates of progress, it will simply take too long for the attainment gap between children in receipt of free school meals and their better-off counterparts to close.

There are a number of challenges facing the Department for Education. The first is social justice. We have to make sure that our enthusiasm and support for early years, where children’s life chances are determined, matches the level of attention that schools and colleges receive. While the Department is investing in early years, there are also creative things that could be done to make better use of existing funds—for example, by reducing the threshold of the tax allowance on the 30 hours from £100,000 to £60,000. This would raise approximately £150 million to extend the free entitlement, or possibly fund maintained nurseries for a longer period than currently set. We also need to make sure that the level of support for students with special educational needs and disabilities is right. We had the first of our oral evidence sessions for our SEND inquiry this morning, and in the autumn we will be holding a combined evidence session to bring together our funding and SEND inquiries.

The next challenge is dealing with the—unfunded—rising cost pressures on schools. We face a crunch point if a recommendation to raise teachers’ pay is not funded. Teacher retention is tough enough without their being told by heads that even a 1% increase would tip the school into deficit.

I now turn to further education, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham). A really important report by the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee has said that the gap in funding between FE and higher education is huge and damaging. In 2016-17, funding per head in FE was £3,000, while in HE it was more than three times higher, at £10,800. Although much of the last figure is borne—at least theoretically—by the individual rather than the state, it is totally inexplicable, especially when one considers that secondary schools are funded more generously than FE and when we know that many people from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit from the FE ladder of opportunity.

The fourth industrial revolution and the ability of schools to equip students of today for the workplace of tomorrow will have a huge impact on our skills base and our need for stronger skills in our country. I am concerned that the Institute for Apprenticeships and the University of Oxford do not get it on vital subjects such as degree apprenticeships and T-levels. Unlike the University of Cambridge, the University of Oxford has closed the door on degree apprenticeships, which is a
huge shame, while the Institute for Apprenticeships said that it was “agnostic” about degree apprenticeships. But degree apprenticeships should be a strategic aim of the Government because they do so much to improve skills and to enable disadvantaged people to climb the apprenticeship ladder of opportunity.

The Government should look at the unsuccessful £800 million access fund, which is not producing great results given that the number of state school pupils going to university has remained pretty static over the past year. Perhaps some of that money could be put towards degree apprenticeships, to help those disadvantaged people benefit and climb that ladder of opportunity.

In conclusion, there has been huge and successful lobbying by the Department of Health and Social Care and significant lobbying by the Ministry of Defence. To be honest, I do not get many emails demanding more tanks in my constituency, but I do get hundreds asking about school funding. The truth is that we need textbooks, not tanks. I urge the Minister and the Secretary of State to do what the Health Secretary has done for the NHS: produce a 10-year plan for education. Go out there and battle for the right funding, so that our school, college and education system is fit for the 21st century.

Several hon. Members rose—

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Since I became the proud Member of Parliament for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough two years ago, teachers and parents have contacted me about the severe challenges facing our local schools. I have listened to their stories about impossible teacher workloads, increasing class sizes and lack of provision for the least privileged children. I am extremely grateful for the input of those teachers and parents.

I have spoken out about how the Government have cut school budgets by £2.8 billion in real terms since 2015; about how local schools have had to forgo residential trips, breakfast clubs, after-school activities and extra learning opportunities for underperforming pupils; and about how schools in Sheffield and across the UK are so cut to the bone that they are now having to let teachers go, as well as teaching assistants and support staff—people needed to support our most struggling students.

Now, as the national funding formula’s “redistribution” leaves Sheffield with the worst schools funding of all the major cities in England, I am outraged. Under the current Government budget, schools in the city will receive £743 per pupil less than Manchester in the next academic year. But this is not a matter of taking from Peter to pay Paul; it is one of fair funding for all—from Sheffield to Slough, from Manchester to Maidenhead.

Gill Furniss: I said that there would be differences. The nub of the matter is the differences between northern areas where there is an educational divide: resources should be given to make up those differences. They should not be taken away from us, as we are now seeing. Some of our headteachers are being pushed to the limit. One is predicted to lose a staggering £190,000 by 2020, meaning a reduction in teachers, teaching assistants and other crucial resources.

At a time when the Sheffield school-age population has increased by 7% across the decade, which has also led to a greater demand for specialist services and special educational needs, the Government ought to be putting more much-needed resources into the system. They have consistently failed to do so. Instead, they are pumping money into grammar schools—so much for helping the “just about managing”. We need an alternative.

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I have been listening patiently to the hon. Lady, but I must tell her that under the national funding formula, schools in Sheffield city will attract 6.6% more funding once the Sheffield school-age population has increased by 7% across the decade, which has also led to a greater demand for specialist services and special educational needs, the Government ought to be putting more much-needed resources into the system. They have consistently failed to do so. Instead, they are pumping money into grammar schools—so much for helping the “just about managing”. We need an alternative.

Gill Furniss: Well, we have done our figures up north. I am telling the Minister the figures that we have got—and they do not match his.

We know that an alternative is possible. We, on this side of the House, have pledged to reverse the cuts and replace the national funding formula with a fairer funding system; to cap class sizes at 30; to give back control to local councils; to implement an effective accountability framework in schools; and to invest in comprehensive SEN training, ensuring that all staff are able to support the diverse needs of their students.

I am extremely proud of my city and its resilience. Teachers, parents, trade unions, councillors and even the local newspaper have come together to resist these changes; last week a petition was launched by The Star to demand that the Government deliver a fairer funding system for the city’s schools. I will support that and Headteachers in Sheffield have openly said that they will struggle to keep schools operating to their current standards.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I appreciate that there is a difference between Sheffield and Manchester, but does the hon. Lady accept the principle of being a national funding formula? If she does, she must accept that there will be differences between different cities in different parts of the country.

Gill Furniss: I said that there would be differences. The nub of the matter is the differences between northern areas where there is an educational divide: resources should be given to make up those differences. They should not be taken away from us, as we are now seeing.
Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): Regardless of our background, upbringing, gender or religion, we should all have the same opportunities. Hard work and ambition should be the defining factors in social mobility, so I am encouraged by the Government’s commitment to a world-class education for everyone and by the introduction of a new national funding formula that gives every local authority more money for every pupil in every school.

Of course, increased education spending is only part of the story. There are now 1.9 million more children being taught in schools rated good or outstanding than in 2010. That is helping to ensure that every child will receive a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Emma Hardy: Has the hon. Gentleman read the recent report that looked into the issue of there being more children in good and outstanding schools? It said that the number of children in such schools had increased because the number of children had increased. Actually, a high number of such schools have not seen an inspection since 2010. Does he agree that the figure could be at least a little misleading?

Craig Tracey: I have not seen the report that the hon. Lady has mentioned, but in my own constituency standards and exam results have been improving. From my own personal experience, that is happening on the ground. I will come back to that in a minute.

What is happening is helping ensure that every child will receive a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Locally in North Warwickshire and Bedworth there has been a significant improvement in school ratings. In fact, according to figures released in December, our local community was one of the best improved areas for pupils attending good or outstanding schools since 2010—an increase of nearly 8,000 children. That is helping to ensure that every child will receive a good education and the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

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finding it difficult to recruit and retain teachers, and many schools are finding it difficult to get a headteacher on the first recruitment exercise, he may well want to reflect on whether his party’s policies are having quite the positive impact he claims.

If I may, I would like to go back to the opening remarks by the Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon). I praise his request for the message from this debate to be that we want investment in textbooks not tanks and a 10-year plan for education. It does feel that education is the public service that is not receiving sufficient attention around the Cabinet table in the negotiations with the Treasury. He was too polite to say so, but perhaps I can say that it is a pity the Secretary of State for Education is not here in person to hear the call for a 10-year plan for education. What I am sure he would not want to say at this stage is what my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) rightly said, which is that there needs to be more support, investment and pride in the contribution that comprehensive schools make, and more praise for the efforts of local councils to support high attainment and good standards in our schools. The idea that councils and local education authorities were ever a dead hand hindering high standards was always a nonsense and it is particularly a nonsense at the moment, given the huge cuts in funding to local authorities that LEAs have to deal with.

I want to make the rest of my remarks unashamedly parochial. I am fortunate to represent an area, the London Borough of Harrow, that has been deemed by the Education Policy Institute as offering the best education in terms of the increase in standards from when a child enters school to when they leave. While all the teachers and headteachers in Harrow are delighted with that accolade from the EPI, none would say they have sufficient resources.

My local schools work extremely closely together. The headteachers pride themselves on their co-operation and collaborative spirit. It is led in particular by the high schools. In my constituency, Whitmore High School, Nower Hill High, Harrow High and Rooks Heath work particularly closely together. All have very strong academic reputations. In particular, I want to single out the heads of Rooks Heath and Whitmore High School. The head of Rooks Heath was named not so long ago as the London headteacher of the year and the headteacher at Whitmore has a particularly good reputation, having led the school through a period of refurbishment and redevelopment.

Bentley Wood, Park, Canons Salvatorian and Sacred Heart are schools just outside my constituency—not quite as well politically represented as the four I have already named. All have strong reputations, all have effective leadership and all show good academic performance. However, all are crying out for more investment in funding. They have noted, as the heads of primary schools in my constituency have, that they are having to cope with an increase in employers’ contributions, an increase non-teaching pensions, teachers’ pay awards not being fully funded, non-teaching pay awards not being fully funded and the apprenticeship levy. Those pressures amount on average to an extra £54,000 in costs per primary school in Harrow and an extra £159,000 per secondary school. Similarly, schools in Harrow are having to cope with reductions in income from the way in which the minimum funding guarantee works and from reductions in their pupil premium grant. On average, primary schools are losing income. In 2017-18, £37,000 was lost per primary school and every secondary school lost £79,000. In terms of the additional school funding pressures facing every headteacher and governing body, the average overall in Harrow last year was almost £100,000 per primary school and £238,000 per secondary school, and that urgently needs to be addressed.

Nick Gibb: I am listening very carefully to the points that the hon. Gentleman is making, but he should be aware that no school in his constituency will lose funding. In fact, they will gain funding under the national funding formula, once we reach the end point, of 2.4%.

Gareth Thomas: I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman that he is very welcome to come to Harrow, and I would be very happy to organise a roundtable for him with headteachers of primary schools and secondary schools, because the experience that he describes is not the one that they have to face on a daily basis in managing their funding needs. He is sitting next to his colleague, the Minister for Apprenticeships and Skills, who I was glad to meet to discuss the funding needs of a sixth-form college that faces significant additional financial pressures.

More funding needs to be put into the school education system. Harrow needs it and every other school needs it—

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gareth Thomas: Much as I would be delighted to invite the hon. Gentleman to join the Minister for School Standards in visiting Harrow, I hope that in the light of what Madam Deputy Speaker said, he will forgive me for not allowing him to intervene. Finally, there needs to be a 10-year funding plan and crucially, more investment next year in funding for schools across England and particularly, if the House will forgive me, in Harrow.

3.30 pm

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and, on the Government side of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey), who made very pertinent points about the need to maintain funding for maintained nurseries, which do such a fantastic job. I also thank the Backbench Business Committee, of which admittedly, I am a member, and our illustrious chairman, the hon. Member for Gateshead (Ian Mearns), who is sitting opposite me, for granting time for this debate.

There are “lies, damned lies and statistics”—how true that is for the important debate on the expenditure of the Department for Education. How true those words are for the barrage of claims and counter-claims. How true Disraeli’s quip is for neatly summarising our dilemma of who to believe. To misappropriate another eminent Victorian, in terms of education funding at least, it is “the best of times” and “the worst of times”. In Dickens’ “A Tale of Two Cities”, we read of a land of
great contrasts. Today, we hear of schools in different parts of the country that are similarly contrasting. There are sirens calls for parental funds for toilet paper in Berkshire while those in the inner capital supposedly cannot find enough things on which to spend their money.

It is true that there has never been more public money spent on education, and the Government are to be commended for that. Indeed, the diversion of a further £1.2 billion is a good start, but I want to be able to recommend Her Majesty’s Government for even greater commendation. I want my right hon. and hon. Friends to go further. Bluntly, I want more cash for schools in my constituency. Without sounding too demanding or unreasonable, even at the risk of being less macho in the eyes of my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, I want to be able to put the case as to why the schools budget must be increased.

Have I, as a Conservative, lost my sense of fiscal rectitude? Am I, for saying “spend more money”, seeking to be a pale imitation of a socialist? Am I fearful of the rapacious march of left-wing fanaticism, which we see embraced with wild abandon by segments of our society? I think not. Rather, like any good Conservative, I believe in investing money wisely in things with a proven record of return, and there is no greater stock worth investing in than our children’s education.

Schools in Stockport, the borough that I partly represent, are among some of the most poorly funded in the country, so it is a tremendous credit to them that they generally achieve such good results, yet I fear that we are at a point at which this is becoming unsustainable. I say “unsustainable” because, being well managed, they had to be careful with the budget for years, well before the current cost pressures were brought to bear, and therefore, put simply, because they are financially lean there is little scope for the efficiencies envisaged by the Department.

Since being elected to this place, I have sought to build strong professional relationships with the schools and headteachers in my constituency. I have always been grateful for their insight on the issue of school funding. It is fair to say that they are asking not for the same results as their peers on wildly differing budgets. It is only right that teachers have better pay and conditions, although this should not adversely affect overall teaching and learning.

Heeding your advice, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will conclude by offering some thoughts to the Government in all seriousness and with good will and encouragement. There has been much understandable focus on the national health service, but we must not allow justifiable funding needs to crowd out other vital areas of the public sector. To my mind, and I sense the same in many colleagues, the schools budget is one such that deserves equal attention, care and consideration.

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg). His conversion to socialism is very welcome on the Opposition Benches. I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on behalf of the children and teachers in my constituency.

I came into Parliament was to champion fairness, so I welcome, in principle, the idea of fair funding for education, but what we have is far from fair. Rather than robbing Peter to pay Paul, we ought to acknowledge that the funding pot for education must grow also. That would be a better way to invest in the future than by investing in the children in our schools and nursery schools. One reason I entered Parliament was to champion fairness, so I welcome, in principle, the idea of fair funding for education, but what we have is far from fair. Rather than robbing Peter to pay Paul, we ought to acknowledge that the number of children has grown and that therefore the funding pot for education must grow also. That would serve us all better than to keep arguing about which child should have funding taken away from them and which child should benefit.

At every level in my constituency—I am led to believe that it is the same nationwide—children are being starved of funding in the provision of their education. In the state-maintained nursery schools, which I have had much contact with, the staff are doing a sterling job dealing with some very difficult times. The number of children with special needs in those nursery schools has grown by as much as a quarter. There is a justification for extra funding. These organisations, of course, are funded not as schools, which they are, but as child-minding facilities, which is clearly insufficient. If we do not take action, we will lose this very excellent resource.

In my constituency, a third of all children are growing up in poverty, and that figure rises to 50% in some wards. These children need to be supported and given the foundations to progress through their education. Without that, they will never progress in school. There has
been talk about who to believe. Understandably, the public are confused. The Government say there is more funding in education, while we say it is not enough. It is true that it is not enough. More funds may well be going in, but there are far more children, and their needs have grown. There are schools in my constituency in which headteachers report that up to 10 children in an academic year are attempting suicide, but the resources that they need to support those children are falling. Schools in my constituency are to lose £500 per child, at a time when they are dealing with additional pressures as well as additional children.

This is not helping to grow our economy, and it is not helping our national prosperity. It is about time we had an honest conversation about it. If we as a country are serious about our future prosperity and if we are serious about investing in our children, we must prioritise their education. We must support the state-maintained nursery schools, and treat them as the schools that they are. They are inspected as schools but they are not funded as schools, and it is about time they were. We must support our primary school teachers, so that class sizes do not keep rising as staff are made redundant in response to funding crises. We must support our secondary schools and help them to deal with those troubled young people.

Cutting education budgets—are we seeing that at the moment: it is a reality—is short-sighted in the extreme. It is starving our nation of its future. This is not the way to grow our economy, and I implore the Minister and the Secretary of State to bear that in mind.

Grammar schools have been mentioned. I have no principled objection to them, but I fail to see how opening a grammar school in my constituency would help teachers to support children who are trying to commit suicide or help nurseries that are threatened with closure when they are supporting some of the most deprived children in the country.

I urge the Minister to listen and to fund our schools properly, not taking from one child to give to another, but ensuring that all teachers—all the professionals—have the funds that they tell us they need to do their job.

3.41 pm

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper). I shall return to her point about growing the economy. It is also a pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), the Chairman of the Education Committee, who introduced the debate so elegantly.

We have already heard from Dickens via my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg). I sensed a slightly Micawberish tendency on the part of my right hon. Friend, and indeed the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas), in regard to the NHS announcement: a feeling that that positive announcement might somehow crowd out expenditure on education and the work of other Departments. In fact, when we look at the history of the NHS, it is extraordinary to see how closely education spending has mirrored its real-terms increases, year in year out. Since the creation of the NHS, education spending has grown nearly tenfold, from less than £10 billion to £87 billion this year. These things are not contradictory.

Of course, the past is no guide to the future. Let me now pick up the point made by the hon. Member for Burnley. We need to grow our economy. We need to increase our GDP, and with it our tax base. That is why my right hon. Friend was so right to flag up the need for investment in this area. Any chart, or any analysis of our projected population growth over the next 30 years, makes the position very clear. We will see a significant rise in our population, but the working population will not grow. We are relying on a smaller number of people to produce the goods to fund both our education and our NHS—indeed, all our public services.

We make our sums add up through productivity, and at the heart of that is education. Its impacts are twofold. First, there is a clear correlation between educational outcomes and productivity, which is why I welcome the emphasis that our country places on education. We are spending more on it, as a proportion of GDP, than any other country in the G7—more than France, Italy, the United States or Japan. Secondly, the creation of a land of opportunity in which anyone can succeed is fostered by a good education system. That is why I welcome the pupil premium, about which we have already heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow, and why I particularly welcome—here I thought that he was a little ungenerous—the narrowing of the attainment gap between the most privileged and the least privileged pupils.

Let me now turn from the general to the specific and the national funding formula. I think that the principles behind it are sound. We all want a transparent funding system that distributes funds to maximise opportunity and reflects the pressures on schools from deprivation, low prior attainment and the number of pupils for whom English is a second language. It is positive that the NFF recognises it, and it does so against a demographic map of the UK that is superior to anything that has gone before it. For understandable reasons, Ministers did not move straight to the ultimate end-goal pointed to by the NFF, but tapered and softened the results. For fairness to be fully established as greater resources are directed to the sector, the full implications of the NFF will, I hope, work their way through, so that areas such as Horsham, which always have been and remain less well funded on a per pupil basis than elsewhere in the country, see further increases in their funding.

Every one of my secondary schools benefited from the minimum funding guarantee. I campaigned for that and welcomed the guarantee, and this reflects to me the importance of either maintaining a guarantee into the future or ensuring the full implications of the NFF are worked through over time.

I totally agree with my right hon. Friend that we should not be unpicking consultations. They take time, and a lot of work and effort was put into those consultation processes, but there are three areas I would highlight for the future. First, the high-needs block has been discussed; it is less easy to make economies on this scale and to be efficient, and these are kids who really do need our support, whether in special schools or through funding their progress through mainstream education. Resources targeted at them not only help some of our most vulnerable children, but have an impact across schools as a whole.

Secondly, a discussion of the area costs adjustment of the NFF leads to the risk of getting technical, but while I appreciate that its purpose is to reflect local wages...
rather than the local cost of living, I think the latter would be more appropriate, and when one looks at the London fringe, one sees that that has in reality spread far faster than the Department recognises. Costs have risen significantly. This affects teacher recruitment and retention, and this is a technical area that could be productively re-examined.

Finally, on teachers’ pay, we need to continue to recruit and retain highly motivated subject experts. That is perhaps peculiarly hard on schools in areas such as Horsham on the fringes of London with, I am delighted to say, areas of high employment and high-value employment. For such areas, getting good teachers in to teach STEM subjects is difficult. The Treasury has for other Departments looked creatively at pay, and I hope that it will look at it creatively again here if the evidence shows, as I suspect it will, difficulties in retaining and recruiting.

I will conclude my remarks on a positive note. Nationally, we have more pupils in good and outstanding schools than ever before, and I welcome the fact—I particularly praise the Minister for School Standards for this—that our international results are so much better. Huge amounts of good work are being done in our schools. I praise the heads and teachers in my schools, who, whatever the pressures are leading to problems with recruiting teachers?

3.47 pm

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin).

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, school funding has risen on average by around 2% per year in real terms for secondary schools and 2.4% per year for primary schools every year since the mid-1970s. Much of that growth came under the last Labour Government, who oversaw average growth of some 5% in the first decade of the new millennium and embarked on a huge and desperately needed investment programme to renew our crumbling school buildings. Yet since the 2015 election, according to the IFS, school budgets have fallen by just over 4%.

This Government trumpeted their announcement last year of more funding for schools as though it was some great triumph, when in reality all they have done is ensure that by 2019-20 school funding will be roughly equivalent to the funding in 2011-12. The numbers speak for themselves: 2% a year increases since the mid-70s; 5% a year under the last Labour Government; stagnant under the Tories. That will be the legacy of this Government’s education policy.

These cuts are hitting our schools hard. Analysis by the Education Policy Institute shows that the proportion of local authority schools in deficit nearly trebled from 8.8% in 2012-13 to 26.1% in 2016-17, and that over two thirds of local authority-maintained secondary schools spent more than their income in 2016-17. That is simply not sustainable.

The pain is not only being felt by the schools; it is being felt by the teachers, too. Last year, research by the National Education Union and Tes revealed that 94% of teachers are having to pay for school essentials such as books, while 73% are regularly paying for stationery supplies. How can it be right that those who undertake a role as important as educating our children feel they have no other option than to spend their own money buying supplies? We do not expect our doctors to buy their own medicines, so why should our teachers be any different?

Is it any wonder that the effects of these constant pressures are leading to problems with recruiting teachers? Just under 40,000 teachers quit the profession in 2016—that is 9% of the workforce—and they are simply not being replaced fast enough. There is now a shortfall of some 30,000 classroom teachers, and the problem is particularly acute at secondary level, where 20% of teacher vacancies remain unfilled. Since 2011-12, recruitment of initial teacher trainees has been below target every single year. In addition, the numbers of full-time teacher vacancies and temporarily filled posts have risen since 2011.

Paul Whiteman, the general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, has stated: “The government acknowledges that schools are being asked to do more than ever before. They also accept that costs are rising. But they remain unwilling to meet these increased expectations and costs with sufficient funding.”

Mary Bousted, the joint general secretary of the National Education Union, has added: “It is no wonder that schools are increasingly struggling to provide pupils with basic essentials and having to ask parents to fill the gap.”

These are not politicians; these are the people on the frontline who are witnessing the devastating effect of Tory policies, and we should listen to what they have to say.

It is not just in our schools that the Tories’ ideology of austerity has hit hard. Maintained nursery schools have received no guaranteed funding after 2020, leaving them completely unable to budget for the future. These nurseries serve some of the poorest areas in England, with 64% in the most deprived areas. As things stand, they are set to lose almost £60 million from 2020 unless urgent action is taken. The Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), highlighted this very issue on national radio this morning. When are the Government going to act? Their record on education is nothing short of shameful. My constituents will not be fooled by headline-grabbing Government announcements of more money for our schools or nurseries. The picture is clear, and the figures tell their own story: this Government are failing our schools and our children.

3.52 pm

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill), although it will come as no surprise that I really do not agree with her analysis of the situation. There is perhaps no more important issue that we consider on the Floor of the House than the future of our children. I therefore commend the Government’s efforts to reform the schools funding formula to ensure that we have an education system that is funded fairly across the board.

When I contributed to the Opposition day debate on schools funding in April, I, like other colleagues, took the opportunity to challenge the accuracy of the funding figures published by the School Cuts coalition and warned that Labour was using those figures to mislead the public, including parents in Erewash. Since that
debate, the union-backed group has been forced into an embarrassing retreat, admitting that it had failed to factor the £450 million central school services block funding into its calculations for 2018-19. That funding means that school funding per pupil will be protected in real terms, and that it will be 50% higher by 2020 than it was in the year 2000.

Specifically in Erewash, the new funding formula will mean that schools will receive an average increase of 5%—an increase in spending of £2.6 million. This rights the historic injustices of the postcode lottery and will enable schools to plan their spending more effectively and efficiently. However, this is just one side of the coin. As I have previously said in the Chamber, we must look beyond the balance sheet to what our schools and their inspirational teams of teaching professionals and volunteers are achieving with their resources in order to give our children the very best start in life.

One of the privileges that we share as Members of Parliament is visiting schools across our constituencies and seeing for ourselves the variety of activities taking place and the opportunities they offer to our young people. Just yesterday I was at St John Houghton Catholic Voluntary Academy, where I spoke to members of the Erewash Youth Forum. The forum is made up of students from Friesland School—which has recently become an academy—Ilkeston Academy, Long Eaton School, Wilsnorthe Community School, Kirk Hallam Academy and the host school. The students asked some tough questions, and I dare say that a few of them may be challenging for my job in the not too distant future. It was great to see their enthusiasm and their understanding of the complex issues that affect society, both at their age group and as a whole.

Chaucer Junior School, which visited Parliament again last month, is another outstanding school. It is really community-minded, adopting the flower containers at our new Ilkeston station and carrying out numerous litter picks inspired by the “Clean for the Queen” campaign. Just a few weeks ago, students took part in the “Keep Britain Tidy” campaign organised by the Daily Mail, and I am so pleased for them because they won and will now be visiting the National Sea Life Centre in Birmingham in September.

In summary, I am proud to be part of a governing party that is delivering the economic stability needed to provide a good level of funding for our schools and of a Government who have rightly recognised, through the introduction of initiatives such as T-levels and the renewed investment in apprenticeships, that someone does not have to be academic to achieve in life. The task of educating our next generation is vital. While we may disagree in this place about the strategy to best achieve that, what unites us is our admiration for the people who do this work on behalf of society. Not everyone can teach, but for those who do, it is not just a job, but a vocation.

3.56 pm

Lucy Powell (Manchester Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup). I thank the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) for securing this debate and for encouraging the rest of us on the Education Committee to seek to secure it too.

Despite earlier provocation, I am not going to talk about how we cut the cake; I want to talk about the size of the cake. I am sure that we will hear these two main arguments from the Minister later on: more money than ever is going into education; and the per-pupil numbers are protected. Ministers say that there is more money than ever, but that is never followed by the fact that we have more pupils than ever. Not only do we have significantly more pupils, but the rise in the participation age and extra support for the early years mean that pupils are in education for a lot longer than ever before.

Ministers also say that per-pupil funding has been protected, but they do not say that the costs per pupil have gone up. The maths is quite simple—I am sure that it would make the new reception curriculum—because if there are more costs, but the cash is the same, spending power will decrease. There will be less cash to spend on teachers, textbooks and all the rest. This is not about the funding formula; it is about the size of the cake, which is insufficient to meet the current costs of our education system.

For schools in particular, the lack of funding is coinciding with the teacher recruitment crisis. That is adding to the costs, because the costs of recruitment and of supply teachers are so high, but there has also been massive change. At any other time, new curriculums, new exams and new assessments would require extra investment, not less money, so a huge strain is being put on the system as a whole.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): The argument about the size of the cake is pertinent. Almost 140,000 more children have joined the system over the past 12 months. That means 140,000 more children to eat the cake, so we need a bigger cake.

Lucy Powell: I thank my hon. Friend. I think the actual figure for the system as a whole is a lot higher than that.

Further education, as the right hon. Member for Harlow said, has also been starved of cash since 2010. The spending power of higher education has increased by around 25%—austerity certainly has not hit that sector—but FE has seen cuts of around the same amount at a time when it is being asked to do more. FE colleges must now undertake constant GCSE English and maths resits—we are not quite sure what the outcomes of that are when a norm-referenced statistical framework is being used, which means that so many people have to fail every year—along with delivering apprenticeships and offering new curricula. Post-16 education needs to be looked at urgently.

It is for those two reasons that we need a long-term funding settlement for education. The NHS has one, as we have already heard, but where are the voices in Government pushing the Treasury for a long-term funding settlement for education? We need a 10-year plan for education that takes account of need, of the numbers coming through the system and of the requirements of our economy not just today but tomorrow. I am afraid that is woefully lacking.

We are a bit hand to mouth at the moment. There is constant policy change, with little forecasting of budget requirements. No wonder we see this crisis in education. Ministers need to up the ante when making these arguments.
The remainder of my speech will focus on maintained nursery schools. Yes, overall funding for childcare has gone up under this Government, but who benefits? The analysis I did with the Social Market Foundation, and analyses from the Education Policy Institute, the Resolution Foundation and others, shows that the vast majority of the extra money the Government are putting into early years is going to top earners—in fact, 75% of the extra £6 billion is going to top earners—which is changing the social mobility arguments and tipping them the other way.

We know that the early years matter, because the single biggest indicator of how well a child will do in their GCSEs is still their development level at the age of five. Children from more affluent backgrounds hear over 30 million more words by the age of three than those from less advantaged backgrounds. Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds are twice as likely not to reach early learning goals at the age of five. The evidence is clear about quality early education.

As we heard on the “Today” programme this morning—the Minister was on the programme, and he made some of these arguments himself—our maintained nursery schools are the jewel in the crown of social mobility, but this is now becoming urgent. We cannot wait for the comprehensive spending review to secure the funding. Maintained nursery schools were offered three years’ transitional funding nearly two years ago, and the CSR will not be for another year, by which time those nurseries will be right at the cliff edge. Maintained nursery schools are disappearing now, so we have to get this sorted, and sorted fast.

I gently say to Ministers, who I know are personally committed to these agendas, that we will support them if they want to get out there and be a bit more bolshie—or should I say macho?—in pressing the Treasury for extra funding. If they are not careful, to use another metaphor, the macho tanks of the Secretary of State for Defence and of other Departments will be parked firmly on the lawn of the Treasury while Education Ministers politely put their hands up at the back of the class. 4.2 pm

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) and other colleagues who have made thoughtful contributions and to add my voice to this important debate. I disagree with the hon. Lady’s cake analogy, because funding is, of course, allocated on a per pupil basis. The more pupils a school has, the more funding it will receive.

“Stoke-on-Trent is leading the way in innovative practice...a city with so much to offer, but too many children and young people leave school on the back foot, and do not have the skills and tools required to access the opportunities on their doorstep.”

Those are not my words, but the words of the Secretary of State for Education in the delivery plan for the Stoke-on-Trent opportunity area, 2017 to 2020. He is right, and the work going on in the city is a welcome line of spending from his Department.

It is an important line of spending for a number of reasons. First, the opportunity area does much to leverage partnership funding, volunteering and expertise, both from national organisations and local stakeholders. Secondly, it embeds national policy in a particular local context or, seen another way, it embeds particular local priorities in the context of national policy. Thirdly, it enables workstreams locally that will be of national benefit by further raising the skills and productivity of a city that is on the up, with a resurgent ceramics industry and a richer creative and advanced manufacturing economy.

Ian Mearns: The hon. Gentleman is speaking eloquently about the benefits of having an opportunity area in the Stoke-on-Trent area. Does he not find it surprising that Her Majesty’s Government have seen fit not to have a single opportunity area in the north-east?

Jack Brereton: The hon. Gentleman should take that up with the Government. My area is certainly not one that has been traditionally Conservative. I am the first Conservative MP to represent my area in 82 years, so there are challenges to any suggestion that these opportunity areas are just being allocated to Conservative areas.

As I was saying, that resurgence is firing up the need for an increased number of skilled, rounded educated workers. Like many towns and cities outside London, ours needs not only to improve our rates of educational attainment, but to retain educated graduates and skilled workers, who are too often lured to the larger more metropolitan cities. Essential to that is more effectively bridging the gap between education and the economy, ensuring that our young people have the right skills for the job opportunities available locally. Critically, in Stoke-on-Trent this must be about raising aspirations, with our entire city focused on ensuring all our young people are able to and have inclination to reach their full potential.

Although school standards and results in Stoke-on-Trent are on an upward trajectory, and we have seen vast improvements in most recent years, we still need to go further to ensure that all our schools and children are able to access the quality of education they deserve. Many of the problems we are having to reverse in Stoke-on-Trent are deep-seated and long-standing. As recently as December 2016, nearly half of all learners in secondary education across the city were in schools judged by Ofsted to be less than good. At key stage 2, Stoke-on-Trent’s children are behind the national average in reading, writing, maths and science. Thankfully, this picture has now started to improve and we have seen a number of these schools make significant progress over the past two years. I am especially pleased that the schools in Stoke-on-Trent will benefit from reform of the funding formula, addressing long-standing inequalities in the old formula, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin) about the high-needs block.

All the secondary schools across my constituency are now improving, and I hope that will be further demonstrated in the results in August. A vital part of achieving that is having high standards of teaching and leadership in our schools. For teachers to be their best we must liberate them to teach, rather than saddle them with unnecessary burdens. I was pleased to welcome the Minister for School Standards to Stoke-on-Trent South to talk to primary heads and deputies recently about reducing unnecessary teacher workloads. We heard examples of outstanding practice taking place in Stoke-on-Trent, and I know the Minister was impressed by the teachers he met.

For our young people, careers advice is also crucial to broadening horizons to both academic or vocational routes. So it is welcome that the Careers & Enterprise Company is working to ensure that every secondary school and post-16 provider in Stoke-on-Trent will have
access to an enterprise adviser. We are talking about senior figures from business volunteering their time in schools, and a share of £2 million investment, so that every secondary school pupil has access to at least four high-quality business encounters.

I am also delighted to say that recent efforts to increase applications to Oxford and Cambridge from A-Level students in Stoke-on-Trent seem to be working. I was particularly pleased to see the work done at Ormiston Sir Stanley Mathews Academy recently, with the brilliant club scholars programme to widen access to the top universities and push our children to achieve their best. By getting our educational base right, we can open up new possibilities, especially for children from deprived backgrounds. Important in that is the engagement of organisations such as Young Enterprise and the National Citizen Service with the opportunity area.

4.8 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): It is pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton), whose constituency I suspect shares many problems with mine. We could range widely in this debate about education estimates, but I wish to focus on one particular area: the role of our nursery schools and their importance in opening up opportunity.

I wish to begin by thanking the Chair of the Select Committee for pressing this debate. On this issue of nursery schools, I wish to thank my hon. Friends the Members for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin) and for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), who, from the Front Bench and the all-party group on nursery schools, nursery and reception classes respectively, argue the case for these schools with skills and passion, week in, week out.

We have to recognise that there are parts of the country where there is a deep political and economic disaffection: working-class areas where people feel, with some justification, that they do not get a fair share and that the best chances and the biggest rewards go to others and not to them. That is where education comes in. My constituency is at the wrong end of a lot of league tables. Our unemployment rate is around three times the national average; for those who are in work, their pay is around £100 a week less than the English average; we have something like three times the national average proportion of working-age people with no formal qualifications whatsoever; and we have a far lower percentage of people with higher educational qualifications than the national average.

When it comes to the cycle of disadvantage and lack of opportunity, inequality sets in early. We already know that when it comes to starting school there is a development gap, variously measured at 12 or 15 months, between children from the lowest-income backgrounds and those who are better off. If that development gap is not addressed early, it can affect people for the rest of their lives, holding them back from learning what they might have learned, cutting them off from opportunities and careers that they might have had, and reinforcing the inequality and lack of social mobility that is so prevalent in our country.

If we are to address the cycle, we have to start in the early years, and our nursery schools are at the frontline of that effort. I regularly visit wonderful nursery schools in my constituency, including Windsor Nursery School, Bilston Nursery School, Phoenix Nursery School and Eastfield Nursery School. The staff in those nursery schools do a fantastic job. They are fuelled by a passion to give every child the best possible start in life, no matter what that child’s background is. No child is written off. The staff will accept second best for no one. They are conscious of the importance of their role and, rather than be daunted by it, they are inspired by it and are in turn inspiring to others through their efforts.

When I visit these nursery schools, as committed and passionate as the staff are, they make two points to me, and I want the Minister to reflect on them. First, they say that the new funding formula, with its emphasis on per-pupil per-hour funding, does not reflect the reality of their costs. These are nursery schools with a fixed cost base. The emphasis on per-pupil per-hour funding, particularly in highly mobile areas where pupil rolls can go up and down, makes it almost impossible for them to plan for the future. They need to know whether they can employ a good headteacher. They need to know that they can invest in the development of staff. They need to know that they can continue to provide the essential help for special educational needs and for children with disabilities that they are so good at. They cannot do that adequately if they do not know what their budgets are going to be from year to year. There used to be a lump sum in the funding formula—on top of the hourly fee—that helped schools to plan in that way. That element has now gone, leaving staff living from year to year, if not month to month, without knowing what the future holds.

Secondly, nursery schools need more certainty about the future of even the per-hour funding. At the moment, the impact of the new funding formula has been tempered by transitional relief, but as we have heard that is not guaranteed beyond 2019-20. What is going to happen after that? If the supplementary funding is not continued, it will be a disaster for these schools. One federation of two nursery schools in my constituency projects a loss in income of more than £100,000 per year per school, if there is no supplementary funding beyond 2019-20.

It is good that we have a 30-hour offer for three and four-year-olds, but I would like to see a deeper and more universal early-years offer. The key point is that whatever the number of hours the Government offer, it is essential that the offer is funded properly in a way that recognises not just pupil numbers but the real-world costs of running a nursery school.

In conclusion, the way in which we treat this policy area says much about our attitude to social mobility. If we get it right and give it the priority that it deserves, we can break through some of the barriers that hold people back. If we do something on this, we can offer a real answer to some of the grievance and disaffection that I spoke of. Plenty of politicians out there are content to pour petrol on anger. That should not be our role; we should be offering a chance, not a grievance. If we are serious about it, we should start in the early years.

4.15 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is an honour to follow the right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden).

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) for leading us through this very important debate. It is a pleasure to speak, because, as the son of
not just a teacher, but a trade union steward of the NASUWT. I promised my mother that I would speak often on the subject of education, perhaps to make up somewhat for the disappointment of my becoming a Conservative MP. I will continue to speak up, and hopefully I will win her round eventually.

I am particularly proud of this Government’s record. Yes, we have issues with regard to funding, and I will touch on them in the minutes that I have available. The reality is that 86% of our schools are now good or outstanding, and that is the absolute acid test for how our schools are doing. That figure has gone up from 66%. Regardless of political views, some credit for that rise should be given to the Department as well as to the teachers, the heads and indeed the pupils of all those schools that have excelled in recent years. I do hope that the Opposition will take that in a spirit of fairness.

I want to thank all the teachers. I am sure that all MPs will understand when I say that going into a school gives me an enormous lift. On Friday, I went into Robertsbridge comprehensive school in my constituency, having had a particularly bruising week. The reality was, however, that the pupils did not really give a stuff about what had happened to me. All they cared about was how that was going to affect them in their future. Their optimism, their positivity and their belief that they can and will take on the world must surely rub off on all of us as constituency MPs, and, hopefully, make us work harder for them in this Chamber.

I want to touch on early years, primary school, secondary school and then sixth form if time permits. I am very proud that the £6 billion spent on childcare is giving parents an opportunity to provide for and to give back to their children. I speak to many nursery providers and to the parents who use the nurseries. Undoubtedly, the feedback is really positive in terms of take-up and indeed in the way that things are working out. I am sure that, like many constituency MPs, I speak to many providers who do feel that the cost is a bit of a stretch. I have asked the Chancellor and the Department for Education team whether it would be possible for the well-deserved pay rise for teachers to be funded outside of the education budget. There is no point in us fighting so hard and being so grateful to get that extra £1.3 billion for our schools, only to find that it is taken out in pay rises because about 80% to 90% of the schools budget is spent on pay. I very much hope that the Exchequer will look at that situation.

Before I sit down, I will briefly mention sixth forms. There is only one sixth form within a school in my constituency. The other four schools do not offer sixth form, but there is a sixth-form college. I would like there to be more sixth forms within schools so that my students do not have to travel further afield, but the reality is that funding at the sixth-form level is 10% lower than at secondary place level, and it was 50% higher 20 years ago. This is holding schools back from expanding, which is a shame because it is good for students to stay in the school that has nurtured them.

The Government are doing a fine job. I recognise that more funding has gone in than ever before, but I also recognise the point made by schools that costs have never been higher, which is why I would like to see a little more funding.

4.20 pm

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman). As a co-sponsor of this debate with the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), I believe that it is important that this House has the opportunity to scrutinise fully the Department for Education’s spending. I hope that Members will come to the same conclusion as me—that much more needs to be spent on schools and our young people’s education.

“I hope that we all agree that the aim is to provide the right education for every child. For some children, that will be an education that is firmly based in learning practical and vocational skills. For others, it will be an education based on academic excellence.” —[Official Report, 2 June 1997; Vol. 295, c. 60-61.]

Those are not my words, but the words of the Prime Minister in her maiden speech. I would like to use the next few minutes to examine the Prime Minister’s words to see how they fit with the Department for Education’s policies and spending plans today.

First, let us look at “the right education for every child.” I agree with the Prime Minister’s words that every child deserves the right education, regardless of their background, postcode or the support needed.

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Since the introduction of the new code of practice, there has been a significant increase in the number of pupils eligible to access special educational needs funding, but no proportionate increase in funding from central Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government need to examine pressures on SEN budgets as part of their spending review, to help struggling local authorities such as Cheshire East Council, which is already anticipating a £2 million overspend this year alone?
Thelma Walker: I could not agree more. The Select Committee on Education will be looking at that issue in its inquiry.

Sadly, many children across the country are not given the appropriate support. “Growing up North”, a report by the Children’s Commissioner for England, stated that

“it is also important to understand that a disproportionate number of children in the North are growing up in communities of entrenched disadvantage which have not enjoyed the financial growth or government energy and spotlight that have so boosted opportunities in other areas of the country—London and the South East in particular. As a result, too many disadvantaged children in the North are being left behind.”

That report, alongside work from other organisations such as the Northern Powerhouse Partnership, shows that children are being denied the same quality education and support based just on where they are born.

Furthermore, the Social Mobility Commission’s 2017 “state of the nation” report found that:

“Disadvantaged children are 14 percentage points less likely to be school-ready at age five in coldspots than hotspots: in 94 areas, under half of disadvantaged children reach a good level of development at age five.”

Those are shocking statistics. Both those reports highlight the devastating impact that the lack of social mobility has on children who go to school without having the best start in life—hungry, in dirty clothes, and potentially lacking social and emotional support. This has an impact on the child all the way through their educational journey and into adulthood; it is a cycle of deprivation. I have witnessed such deprivation at first hand throughout my teaching career.

An essential part of delivering this quality education to each child is a nurturing and supportive school environment. I know that teachers and headteachers across the country are working so hard to provide the best education for our children, but funding cuts over the past several years have made their job increasingly difficult.

Secondly, the Prime Minister said:

“For some children, that will be an education that is firmly based in learning practical and vocational skills.”

In addition to the schools system, our colleges and sixth forms are being starved of funding. Figures from the Sixth Form Colleges Association state that 50% of schools and colleges have dropped courses in modern foreign languages, 34% have dropped STEM—science, technology, engineering and maths—subjects, 67% have reduced student support services and extra-curricular support, and 77% are teaching students in larger classes. Since 2010, total expenditure on 16-to-18 education has fallen by an incredible 17.5% in real terms. This area of our education system has been hit hard by cuts.

I have heard personally from leaders in my constituency just how much pressure and stress this is placing on them. In 2017–18, funding for sixth-form colleges is £5,400 per student—the same as it was, in real terms, in 1990. How does supporting a young person by a quarter of what their peers receive demonstrate that the Government value all those who choose practical or vocational qualifications? As was said in one of our sessions at the Education Committee:

“If we were given £9,000 to train health workers, what an amazing system we would have!”

Each one of our young people deserves to have an education and career choices, and to be respected and valued. Is it too much to ask for a genuine and balanced commitment to the further education route?

In the third part of the quote from the Prime Minister’s maiden speech, she says:

“For others, it will be an education based on academic excellence.”

Cutting subjects, raising class sizes and forcing students to learn in dilapidated sheds will not allow academic excellence to be achieved to its fullest potential. Across the UK, £2.8 billion has been cut from school budgets since 2015. That breaks down to an average of £45,000 per primary school and £185,000 per secondary school. Academic excellence should not be open just to those who are wealthy and can afford to pay for private schools for tuition—it should be something that every child, in every classroom, in every school in the country can aspire to.

4.27 pm

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Improving education chances for all young people in my constituency is one of my top priorities, as it will be for many across the House but, sadly, for too many the reality does not match the Government’s rhetoric. So I want to record the reality shared with me by the 67 head teachers from primary, secondary and special schools across the borough of Bury in their letter to The Bury Times in April this year, in which they said:

“Ministers repeatedly claim that education funding is protected and seem to be in denial about the realities of school funding and its impact on children. They talk about there being more money in education than ever before, when there are half a million more children in schools than in 2010. Tough decisions will have to be taken. Governors and Headteachers can no longer guarantee that such cuts will not impact on our children.”

Their letter goes on to warn of the consequences of this funding shortfall—larger class sizes, fewer teachers and senior staff, decept school building, loss of teaching assistants, fewer GCSE options on offer, difficulty in recruiting teachers and so on. One Bury head told me:

“It is quite simple—there is less money in schools. Government rhetoric says that schools’ funding has been maintained but does not mention the additional costs (NI payments, paying for services which were previously free, pay increases, pension increases etc.)”

Most alarmingly, this impacts on children with special educational needs and disability. I am pleased to have secured, with colleagues from the Education Committee in the Chamber today, the SEND inquiry, which has now started. More than half of the Bury heads responding to my survey told me that they had been forced to cut special educational needs provision. Three quarters say that the number of staff they have dedicated to SEN support has either stayed the same or fallen, despite increasing numbers of pupils needing access to it, while 52% expect to have to cut it further in the next two years. One primary head said, “I do not have the necessary funding to support some of our most vulnerable children in terms of SEND.” Schools need support if we are to create and sustain the dynamic mainstream education system that I would advocate.

It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the number of excluded pupils in alternative provision with SEND is on the rise. Some 77% of excluded pupils in 2016-17 had special educational needs and disabilities, with heads
marking the reason for their exclusion from an extensive list of options as “other”. "Other" now represents nearly 20%, despite being a category intended for rare use on which the Department holds no data. In his recent letter to the Education Committee, the Minister for School Standards provided no data for 2017-18 SEND exclusions, which will have been submitted already but are not disclosed. Perhaps he might announce those figures in his closing remarks.

We need more scrutiny of schools’ use of “other” as a reason for excluding, as well as a more sympathetic system that supports and encourages schools to include and does not penalise them through the Ofsted framework. Pressures on our local authorities compound the problem. Some 250 children are being educated out of borough in Bury, at a cost of £6.5 million. I urge the Government to introduce a pupil premium-style funding allocation for children with SEND. Let us call it “SEND spend” and fund it properly. The high needs block funding must rise in line with costs, and the rise in SEND numbers needs to be better reflected explicitly in the system.

In Bury, I have challenged the local authority to commit to no out-of-borough care in five years. Let us not unsettle children who wish to remain, but enable a return to mainstream for children for whom a reasonable adjustment can be made. Alternative provision has a profound role to play—one that I celebrate and defend—but it must not become an alternative to a patient, sympathetic and inclusive mainstream system. This Government has presided over a highly pressurised, poorly funded system that leads schools to off-roll and to exclude, not include. Where now for Every Child Matters? We have a plan for some children, not all, and our most vulnerable are being left behind.

If we delve a little deeper into the Government’s auto-response that 1.9 million more children are in good or outstanding schools since 2010, we see that it is misleading. As I said to the Minister at last month’s Education Committee session, and as the Education Policy Institute confirmed in its report yesterday, a large part of that increase is due to a rise in the birth rate. About a quarter of the 1.9 million pupils—nearly 600,000—are the result of an increase in the population of pupils.

Nick Gibb: Can I point out that, in 2010, 68% of schools were judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding and that figure is now 89%? In between those two dates, Ofsted has raised the bar of what constitutes good or outstanding. Of that figure is now 89%?

James Frith: With respect, the Minister will have a chance to address these points when he sums up.

I have heard of Government intervention, but I am unsure how this Government can take credit for an increase in the birth rate—and anyway, the birth rate increase happened on Labour’s watch. Another quarter of pupils are in schools rated good or outstanding that have not been rated by Ofsted for at least eight years, and 300,000 pupils are in schools not inspected since 2010 because they are in converter academies. I know there is much agreement across the House on these issues, so I say to Ministers: take note of the forensic attention that our heads and your colleagues are paying to performance and ensure that, come the Budget, that is reflected in the allocation.

I will conclude with a brief word on capital spending. In response to my recent request for Lord Agnew and the Secretary of State to consider rebuilding Tottington High in Bury in my constituency, I received a letter acknowledging that the cost of a new school is on average between £9 million and £12 million in current money. Lord Agnew referred us to the £2 million pot given to Bury to look after all its schools. Since the ambitious days of Building Schools for the Future, capital funding has all but disappeared. Tottington High has been overlooked. It was booted off the BSF when the new Government came into power in 2010 and then pushed off their list for new builds. School governors expect more contact from the HSE than the DFE. As I asked the Secretary of State last week, will he send officials from his Department to visit the school to see for themselves the case to rebuild? If he responds to me in this debate, I will update the school when I am proudly its prize-giving speaker on Thursday night.

4.34 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I wonder whether the Minister has any idea how hard schools in Birmingham are finding things these days. It does not really matter if we are talking about LEA schools or academies, because they are all beset by the same funding problems. In Birmingham, the base rate per primary is down by £250. One local school that has made a virtue of catering for youngsters with special needs has lost three experienced teachers, who have been replaced by one newly qualified teacher, and the same school has had to lose five teaching assistants and three dinner ladies.

Let us just look at what is happening to schools in my constituency. In Billesley Primary School, which has been totally transformed thanks to the efforts of one of our most talented heads, the pupil to TA ratio has halved. At Cotteridge, the pupil to TA ratio is down, and it is the same at Colmore Infant and Nursery School, Hollywood, Tiverton Academy, Woodthorpe Junior and Infant School, and Yardley Wood Community Primary School—to name only a few.

Headteachers and experienced teachers are having to vacate their schools for several days a week and tout themselves around as specialist leaders in education, earning £300 to £400 per day just to keep their schools ticking over. That £300 to £400 comes of course from the budgets of failing schools. We are seeing a vicious merry-go-round in which a school that is failing has to sacrifice part of its budget to pay for support from a specialist leader in education, and that specialist leader has to sacrifice the time they should be spending in their own school, teaching the children there, just to earn enough to keep their own school afloat. That is the reality of this Government’s education funding.

The Government’s own workforce census shows that schools in Birmingham lost more than 600 teachers and teaching assistants last year. Just this morning, I received an email from a teacher at a very highly rated primary in my constituency, imploring me to speak out in this debate and tell people how bad things really are. We now find ourselves in a situation where schools are sacrificing ancillary staff, teaching assistants and experienced staff because they cannot afford their salaries, pensions and national insurance contributions. Welcome though any pay rise is, for the head and governors, if of course means another round of redundancies, because this Government have no intention of funding the pay
settlement, pension and national insurance contributions. All this is happening against a backdrop of rising pupil to teacher ratios and a shortage of qualified teachers, with more leaving the profession than entering it.

In secondary schools, we have probably yet to see the worst effects, but they are already subject to a shortfall of £500 million per year in funding for 11 to 16-year-olds from 2015 to 2020, with huge cuts to sixth-form budgets for schools in my constituency. Schools have had to scrap the sixth form because of the detrimental impact the funding shortage was having on children in the lower school. The projected loss of income from 2015-16 to 2019-20 for King’s Norton Boys School is £126,195; for Bournville Secondary, the figure is £359,201; for Dame Elizabeth Cadbury, it is £303,606; for King’s Norton Girls School, £182,261; for Allens Croft Primary, £174,347; for Billesley Primary, £178,959; and Yardley Wood Community Primary School, £166,243.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Steve McCabe: I will not give way at the moment because other people want to speak.

Those are good schools, with excellent leadership teams and committed staff who want to do the best for our children. They are prepared to go the extra mile, working evenings, holidays and weekends. Linda McGrath, the head of Woodthorpe Junior and Infant School, recently found herself thrust into the role of project manager as she attempted to put her school back together following the devastating floods only a few weeks ago—supervising the cleaning and rebuilding work, ordering the necessary materials and finding alternative classroom provision at other schools for her children. She deserves a medal for her efforts, not the budget cut that this Secretary of State is planning to impose on her. That is the reality of school funding today. That is what the Government are trying to disguise. The lesson of this debate should be that the Government have to do much better by our schools.

4.40 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I first declare an interest: my wife is the cabinet member for children and young people at Cheshire West and Chester Council and two of my children attend a local school in the constituency.

The recently published University College London Institute of Education report showed a relationship between inspection grades and changes in the socioeconomic composition of pupils. That means, certainly to my mind, that there is an element of good schools becoming self-fulfilling prophecies. I do not think we should be surprised by the finding: parents, of course, want their children to have the best education possible, but an inevitable consequence is that the parents with the most resources will use them to maximise their chances of getting their child into what they consider to be the best school in the area. Where does that leave others? Where does it leave the challenge of improving social mobility? Surely, that can only go backwards in this scenario? Is there a risk that schools not performing as well in the area could get into a downward spiral that they will struggle to get out of?

I have seen for myself the risks, with the University of Chester Academies Trust; as a multi-academy trust, it has been underperforming for some time. Ofsted first raised serious questions about the whole chain’s performance some 18 months ago. In May, the trust announced that it was cutting staff and trying to offload four schools due to a £3 million deficit. That left three schools still in the trust, including the Ellesmere Port Academy in my constituency, which has itself been in special measures for a year. It was pretty clear to me that the trust did not have the capacity or the resources to survive, let alone drive through the changes needed to turn the school round.

Now, thankfully, a decision has been reached—that it is unviable to allow the trust to continue—but it has taken a long time to get to this point, and there has been a lot of uncertainty for parents, staff and pupils alike. That uncertainty will continue until there is a new sponsor. I hope that one can be found swiftly and I am pleased that we are finally addressing the issue. I find it incredible that the situation was tolerated for so long. Had the MAT been a local authority or any of the schools been under council control, I have no doubt that there would have been action long ago.

As we have heard today, claims that every school in England would see a cash increase in their funding have been challenged—not only by Labour Members, but by the Institute for Fiscal Studies and the UK Statistics Authority. Given that all but one of the schools in my constituency face a funding cut, the true situation is clear: local schools will lose about £3 million between 2015 and 2019. Pupils in my constituency will receive £300 per head less over the next three or four years.

Andy Slaughter: I do not want to indulge in a hierarchy of misery, but every single one of the schools in my constituency will lose money in the five years to 2020—£50,000 to £150,000 for primaries and £300,000 to £600,000 for secondaries. That is more than £500 per child. This is an extraordinary situation. I know that the Minister does not accept these figures; if he does not take them from us, perhaps he should take them from the headteachers in our constituencies.

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend, who is absolutely right. I know from talking to parents, teachers and heads in my constituency that schools are already facing very tough choices. The National Education Union survey told us that 55% of schools that responded said that class sizes had risen in the past year and that more than three quarters had reported cuts in spending on books and equipment. The headteacher survey on the state of our schools post the national funding formula found that 90% of schools are now using pupil premium funds to prop up their basic core budgets. That money is meant to be spent on the most vulnerable pupils rather than as part of the sticking-plaster approach that we are seeing at the moment.

The cuts to school funding also extend to council support. Changes to central support grants will lead to about half a million pounds being lost to my local authority in the next decade, which will further emasculate its already diminished ability to support schools—not that it could help most of them even if it wanted to, thanks to the acceleration of the academies programme. What is that programme actually achieving now? Well, the words of David Laws the other day were quite interesting. He said:
“What we know is that the most successful part of the academisation programme was the early part of it... Those early academies had absolutely everything thrown at them. They were academised school by school, with huge ministerial intervention. The new governors were almost hand-picked. They often brought in the best headteachers to replace failing management teams. They had new buildings. Sponsors had to put in extra cash. Our research shows that much of the programme since then has had little impact on standards.”

In other words, early improvements under a Labour Government have been lost to an ideological drive to create a market and to denude local authorities of a role.

The logical conclusion of the mass academisation of recent years is that the local authority is still the admissions authority, but in name only. Because of the difficulties we have had in one of the schools I referred to, as well as one or two other factors, we have ended up with a totally lopsided admissions process this year, which has led to record appeals, many parents sending their children to schools miles away that were not one of their original three preferences and some parents sadly feeling that they will have to home educate.

Nationally, the number of children being home-schooled has risen by more than 40% in the past three years, according to figures obtained by the BBC. That increase is not just about a broken admissions system, but schools perhaps suggesting that a particular child should be home-schooled to avoid an exclusion or that the school environment might not be the best place for a child if they have special educational needs. Yes, of course some parents are simply exercising parental choice, but for me the rise in the numbers of academies and the rise in numbers of those being home-schooled is surely no coincidence.

Who is monitoring and evaluating this explosion in home-schooled? Has there been a 40% increase in resources to do that? Are we confident that the legislation and guidance in this area is as up to date as it needs to be? Are we comfortable that so many children are being educated in this way? Is this a great example of how parental choice operates, or are parents being forced down this route because they have no real choice? What efforts are being made to ensure that children are able to return to school if they can? What scrutiny is taking place of schools or areas that have higher than average levels of home-schooled? Has any analysis been done on why this is the case?

Those are not easy questions to answer, but they should be asked. I fear that the fragmented system we currently have means that once a child becomes home-educated, they become somebody else’s responsibility. That is the wrong approach. We owe it to all children to ensure that they get the very best education, no matter where they take it.

4.46 pm

Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle) (Lab): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders).

The debate on school funding always appears to follow the same tired pattern. Teachers, parents, education trade unions and the Opposition parties all point to the fact that increased class sizes are having an impact on the number of teachers leaving the profession; the lack of adequate support for children with special educational needs and disabilities; the number of “expensive” subjects cut from the curriculum; the cancelled school visits because the schools cannot subsidise them; the number of teaching assistant jobs that have been cut or reduced; the declining state of the school estate; the request by parents to schools to cut their wish lists out for parents because they cannot afford basic school supplies; and many other concrete examples of continual underfunding. The Government then say, “We have increased funding for schools”. What they do not say is that what they give with one hand they take with another. They repeat their mantra frequently, encouraging all those sitting on the Government Benches to trot it out at every available opportunity. They are desperate to make us believe that the emperor really does have new clothes, but I am sorry to say that those on the Government Front Bench are all completely naked.

The reality is that the IFS estimates that, from 2015-16 to 2018, funding for schools fell in real terms by just over 4% per pupil. Since April 2017, the 0.5% apprentice levy has been an additional burden on the payroll. Schools tell me they see it as an additional tax that they cannot use to improve the learning or outcomes for the pupils in their classes. On top of that, we have had increased national insurance contributions and an increase in inflation. The number of children requiring SEND support has increased by 21% in the past three years.

Nationally, the National Association of Head Teachers undertook a survey called “Breaking Point”, which found that more than four fifths or 86% of respondents had reduced the number of hours of teaching assistants or their numbers to balance their budgets. More than a third of respondents said that they had to reduce the number of hours or the number of teaching staff. Figures sometimes lack the human impact or real story behind them. What difference do teaching assistants make? I can tell the House about the teaching assistants that I worked with in my 11 years as an infant teacher and the difference that they made. Yes, part of it was about the educational achievement of the children who did not often read at home. They were taken every morning by me or the teaching assistant to make sure that they had the time, and the quality interaction, to improve their reading. However, there is much more to it than that. There are stories that do not often come out on the Floor of the House, such as when a child of only six years old decides to vomit everywhere in the classroom. Who has to clear it up? The teaching assistant has to do that because the teacher has to stop the 29 other children going to inspect the vomit that is in their classroom. These things happen in infant school and nursery classrooms, and yet, what happens if we take those teaching assistants away? Imagine the disruption. Every teacher around the country can tell us about the disruption caused by a bee in a classroom, let alone a child who suffers from diarrhoea and vomiting.

Over half the schools in my constituency have had to make teaching assistants redundant. Hull headteachers have already written to the Secretary of State, asking for £5 million extra in funding to help them to support the children who are most in need. Currently, 526 pre-school children in Hull with SEND are going to be starting school in September, and they need the money for the additional support.

As the system is set up at the moment, schools are expected to provide £6,000 in additional support for children with SEND before they can access any other funding, so that is going to be an incredible cost for
4.52 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy).

The funding of our schools is a key issue in my constituency. Reading and Woodley are growing towns with many young families, and many other residents are concerned about the state of schools and education in general. I endorse the points that hon. Members have an opportunity to rethink. I urge Ministers to be a fundamental part of secondary education. The average local authority secondary school deficit in Reading has risen from £300,000 in 2010 to £374,000 in 2018. Taken together, this is close to a perfect storm. The cuts, the relentless changes to the curriculum and examinations and the significant rise in pupil numbers have all put tremendous pressure on our schools. Is it any wonder, then, that teachers are leaving the profession and recruitment is becoming so much harder? I am grateful to have had the opportunity to set out the substantial challenges faced by schools in my constituency and across our country. There is a severe funding crisis—one that is creating close to a perfect storm, when taken together with the other major changes being forced through schools—and yet the Government have an opportunity to rethink. I urge Ministers to listen to teachers, parents and students and seriously reflect on this mistaken approach. Surely, it is worth rethinking austerity after eight failed years.

Emma Hardy

[Emma Hardy]

those schools. I ask the Minister: what does he think is happening to those children in schools? Where does he think they are going? What happens to the children that nobody wants? They end up being off-rolled and put in alternative provision. The number of children being home-educated or educated outside a school setting has risen from 3,305 in 2010 to 8,304 in 2017, so 8,304 children are waiting for adequate education, and there is huge competition for specialist places in specialist schools.

The forthcoming report from University College London’s Institute of Education said that the system is now pushing schools and their heads to prioritise “the interests of the school over the interests of groups of, usually more vulnerable, children”.

Some schools were found to be engaged in “aggressive marketing campaigns and ‘cream skimming’ aimed at recruiting particular types of students”.

That is the true legacy of this Government’s education reforms—a legacy that excludes and treats the most vulnerable people in our society in this way.

The world is becoming an increasingly dangerous place, with dangerous ideals being promoted closer and closer to home. Now is the time to be pouring our money into education, fighting fake news and preparing our children for the fourth industrial revolution, because before we complain about the cost of education, we should first consider the cost of ignorance.

4.56 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): I start by paying tribute to our teachers, our teaching assistants and the school staff for the remarkable work they do. I think of Osborne Nursery School, where a grandmother said to me, “Our little boy came here six months ago. He couldn’t string two words together. He was withdrawn and we were worried about him. Now, six months later, we can’t shut him up. He loves the nursery school. He bounces in every morning. He’s going from strength to strength.” I think of the mother at Lakeside children’s centre who told me, “Jack, I was suicidal. I couldn’t cope with two kids, one of whom has severe difficulties, but the children’s centre helped me through. It helped me to become a good mum”.

I think of Twickenham Primary School, where I was told of a young boy, aged seven now, who came from a home with no curtains, carpets, cupboards or wardrobes, where everything was stored in bin bags on the floor. The school had to bring him to school every morning and feed him every day, including at night and the weekend, but it did it, and as a consequence this little boy, who was struggling in a problem home, is now top of his class. I think of secondary schools such as North Birmingham Academy. I remember when it opened its sixth form two wonderful young people from the first intake telling me that they came from families and communities where no one had ever been to university, but how, thanks to a good school, they had that ladder of opportunity.

We see so much that is admirable—but, but, but. What said it all for me was Michelle Gay, the headteacher of Osborne Primary School, who on ITV in March wrote in frustration at the difficulties confronting headteachers having to make difficult choices about laying off teaching assistants, no longer replacing teachers, cutting back on numbers have risen steeply. Schools have also reported serious additional problems with unfunded pay rises and unfunded national insurance increases.

These pressures have fed through into secondary schools, which have also had to respond to significant changes to the curriculum and the introduction of new GCSEs and A-levels, all taking place at the same time. The number of teaching posts has been cut and subjects axed, including German and music—I imagine that many Members would consider both of those subjects to be a fundamental part of secondary education. The average local authority secondary school deficit in Reading has risen from £300,000 in 2010 to £374,000 in 2018. Taken together, this is close to a perfect storm. The cuts, the relentless changes to the curriculum and examinations and the significant rise in pupil numbers have all put tremendous pressure on our schools. Is it any wonder, then, that teachers are leaving the profession and recruitment is becoming so much harder?
maintenance and cutting back on the curriculum, including for the next generation of world-class musicians who are not getting the opportunities they would otherwise have had.

Giving kids the best possible start in life starts with early-years education. In this respect, Birmingham has a proud tradition, with all our children’s centres and the 27 dedicated nursery schools, but cuts to council budgets have meant that, although 18 children centres remain open, 11 have closed. Nationwide, 1,000 Sure Start centres have closed as a consequence of austerity and cuts since 2010. On nursery schools, however, we fought and won the battle two years ago. I am proud to say that that started in Birmingham and then went nationwide. We won a commitment from the Government to provide supplementary funding, which has avoided the complete disaster that would otherwise have befallen those 400 nursery schools. But, but, but. We are coming to the end of the guarantees that were given then. Nursery schools are now being told, “You have to plan for the future.” However, they have no idea whether the Government will continue that supplementary funding, and will the means for them to continue to deliver a world-class education.

That is why tomorrow, along with the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon)—I pay tribute to him for his speech—and my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell), I will be launching, in the all-party parliamentary group on nursery schools, nursery and reception classes, a drive to ensure that the voice of parents of children at those nursery schools is heard by the Government, and that the necessary resources are made available on a continuing basis.

It is not only in early-years education that the problems are mounting; they are mounting also in primary and secondary schools. In Birmingham, 361 out of 364 schools face cuts, and we expect a total loss of £51.4 million by 2020. That means a loss of £293 for every one of Birmingham’s 184,000 children. North Birmingham Academy will lose £552 per pupil, Stockland Green School will lose £503 per pupil, Erdington Academy will lose £360 per pupil, and St Edmund Campion Catholic School will lose £222 per pupil.

The education unions were absolutely right to say that the Government needed to face the facts. Our kids get one chance of a bright future when they go to school, but let us look at what is happening now. There are 137,000 more pupils in schools in England than there were last year, but—and I should tell the Minister that these figures are undeniable, because they come from his Department—there are 5,400 fewer teachers, 2,800 fewer teaching assistants, 1,400 fewer support staff, and 1,200 fewer auxiliary staff. Those facts speak for themselves.

Like other Members who have spoken, I am passionate about the cause of education, because when I was a kid I was fortunate enough to get a good start in life, although my dad was a navvy and my mother was a nurse. I never forget the schools that helped me to get on. I want to ensure that all kids, in Birmingham and in Britain, have the same chances that all of us here have had, but right now the opportunity is being denied to millions, and that is fundamentally wrong.

5.2 pm

Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Let me start by saying that Scottish schools broke up for the holidays last week. I wish all teachers and pupils a sunny, safe and enjoyable holiday. I also congratulate the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) on showing a deep understanding of the issues that school staff are facing.

I want to say something about early-years education. The right hon. Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) made some important points about increased childcare provision, which he said was reaching only a certain sector of society. If we only offer that increased provision to households in which both parents are working, we miss out some of the most vulnerable of those we want to target. According to statistics from the WAVE Trust, maltreatment affects 20% of children, and the most damaging period is when they are between zero and two years old, when the brain is still developing. Such experiences affect their long-term prospects, both educationally and economically: it is estimated that adverse childhood experiences cost the UK economy £15 billion per annum. Not to provide dedicated early-years funding, especially for those in the zero-to-two age group, is particularly short-sighted.

On school funding, many Members, including the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss), painted a grim picture of the reality at the chalk face. Since 2015, when the impact of inflation is taken into account, schools have faced real-terms cuts. The oft-repeated statement from the Government that there are now 1.9 million more children in good or outstanding schools than there were in 2010 was highlighted by the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Emma Hardy). That has less impact when we know that half a million pupils in England attend schools that have not been inspected since 2010, and many have not been inspected for more than 10 years. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe) told us that even the excellent schools in his constituency were struggling under the funding, so this is a warning that the very best are giving us as well.

The forthcoming UCL report on education reforms was referred to by a number of Members. The analysis on high-performing schools accepting fewer children from poor backgrounds is turning out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. A few are actually selecting pupils at that stage. Why are we effectively getting a grammar system whether we like it or not? A comprehensive system works far better at reducing inequalities for those from deprived backgrounds.

The report also mentioned that the original pledge to set schools free and give them more power has led to a system causing high levels of stress among teachers. We can expect nothing else when schools are competing with one another rather than collaborating.

The maths premium has not been mentioned so far. The hope is that this will incentivise the take-up of maths. I have no doubt that this premium has been introduced with the best of intentions, but there is a difficulty: if underfunded schools identify this as a way of raising capital, students could be forced into studying maths when a more suitable pathway might be available to them. This Government have done a lot of work on T-levels, but what if these pupils are directed away from T-levels into maths simply because it will generate more income for the school? If the Government want to tackle productivity and growth, why not offer premiums to schools who achieve positive destinations for their students, with particular focus on careers and areas where there is a skills shortage?
The success or failure of any school always rests with the teachers. With the advent of academies, we are seeing a situation where teachers can be paid at a rate below nationally agreed pay scales. This means that pay scales can be bypassed to allow schools to stretch a budget further. So when we hear politicians praising our dedicated teachers, perhaps we should be asking them if they would be willing to teach a group of 30 or more teenagers with multiple support needs with no support for £24,000 per annum. As one teacher told me: “I would be better off working in a supermarket...at least I would earn overtime.”

I was recently at an event where a fellow MP talked about their disappointment at the lack of uptake of continuing professional development opportunities by teachers during summer holidays. That shows the complete disconnect between the job teachers are doing and the understanding that politicians have. Let us be clear: when teachers have battled their way through the term and have made it to the summer holidays, probably all they are able to do is sleep—as I used to do—for the first fortnight and recharge their batteries. Perhaps a better idea would be to have some politicians teaching in a school for a couple of weeks and really experiencing the issues in an underfunded secondary school. Thankfully, in Scotland we are looking at the issue of pay and conditions seriously and have lifted the pay cap for teachers, and I encourage this Government to do the same.

On further education, a long-term approach to post-16 education funding is needed, with courses linked specifically to needs in the labour market. I do not understand why in England FE colleges are still training young people for jobs that do not exist. Increasing the budget here is not sufficient; we need courses that are tailored to the needs in our jobs market. Brexit will make this issue even more acute, so we really must consider that.

England has the highest university tuition fees in the industrialised world and debt on graduation at £50,000. This is not saving money in the long run. Shortages in key areas, such as nursing, will become far more acute if we do not address this marketisation of higher education. As in early years provision, the lack of funding now will have serious long-term implications.

In Scotland, we value education and the benefit it brings not only to the individual but to society as a whole, and school leaver destination statistics show that we are making great progress in widening access to higher education. The most recent UCAS figures, published in January, show a 13% increase in the number of Scots from the most deprived communities getting places to study at a Scottish university. More importantly, young people must have the destination that is right for them, and Scotland now has the highest positive destination for young school leavers of any nation in the UK. The funding of education is ultimately about choices. The Chair of the Select Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), said earlier that we should fund “textbooks, not tanks”. I would go further, and say that I would fund textbooks, not Trident.

5.10 pm

**Mike Kane** (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): I want to apologise to you straight away, Mr Deputy Speaker. I prepared diligently for this debate, but I had not realised the importance of estimates day debates to the House. I woke up today to headlines in all the newspapers talking about Kane for England, “Go Kane” and Kane for Harry, England and St George. It was not until the shadow Secretary of State turned up in her England top that the penny dropped. However, I am sure that the one thing that the Minister and I would agree on is that we wish our team all the best for tonight. Straight out of the gate, the Chair of the Education Committee, the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon), got the tone right for the debate. He also came up with the best soundbite of the day when he talked about funding “textbooks, not tanks”. I shall carry on with the alliteration and say that textbooks, not Tories, are the best thing for our education system.

There is a great deal to discuss in the Department’s spending review, but as colleagues have had to be brief, I will follow suit. I will start with schools, where the Department does the majority of its spending. In particular, I would like to focus on a claim that the Minister made over the weekend that is particularly relevant to this debate. He took to Twitter to say that “claims that schools would lose money next year are inaccurate. School funding is protected in real terms per pupil—contrary to some inaccurate and misleading claims.”

I for one am glad that the Minister has decided he has a problem with inaccurate and misleading claims. With that in mind, does he believe that every school is going to get more money in the coming financial year? After all, it was the Secretary of State who said that under the current spending plans, “each school will see at least a small cash increase.”—[Official Report, 29 January 2018; Vol. 635, c. 536.]

Unfortunately for his Department, this has been queried by the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies and the UK Statistics Authority. So I ask the Minister to offer us some clarification and to state clearly whether schools will lose money or whether they will see a cash increase.

**Nick Gibb**: I should just like to point out that in the hon. Gentleman’s own constituency, his local authority has been funded to enable schools in Wythenshawe and Sale East to be funded with an increase of 2.3% once the national funding formula is implemented.

**Mike Kane**: I was so looking forward to that! The Prime Minister came to my constituency a few weeks ago to visit a school in Brooklands, in Trafford. That seat had never turned Labour in the history of municipal authority, but it did so that night and Labour took Trafford, because Trafford is losing £3.3 million in spending power for its schools.

Under the Department’s spending plans, schools will see cuts to their budgets for the third year in a row. I know that the Minister will be tempted to rehearse his prepared rebuttal and tell us how the Government have protected per-pupil spending in real terms, despite the fact that £2.7 billion in real terms has been cut since 2015. Those were the first schools cuts in a generation. Despite all the shallow talk of protecting budgets and extra funding, the future of our schools is not safe under the Tories.

While we are talking about the Department’s spending plans for next year, I know that there is one issue that teachers and school leavers across the country need an answer on, and that is pay. The Government’s own...
research has shown that their pay policy has left teachers nearly £4,000 worse off in real terms since they came into office. It is hardly a surprise that the Government are overseeing a crisis in the recruitment and retention of the teachers that our children and country need. Will the Minister admit that his pay policy has played a role in driving teachers out of the profession? If not, will he tell us why they are leaving the classroom in record numbers? For every teacher coming in, one is leaving the profession.

Teachers and other public sector staff have been repeatedly promised that the public sector pay cap has come to an end, but schools have been given no certainty about any pay rise or how it will be funded. So, will the Minister tell the House when the School Teachers’ Review Body will be publishing its annual report? Surely the Minister agrees that, without enough money to pay for higher wages, anything he utters from the Dispatch Box about an end to the pay cap is absolutely meaningless to the thousands of hard-working teachers who have not seen a real pay rise in years.

Before I end my speech, I want to discuss our student finance system. The Department’s estimates show that spending on the payment of student loans will be over £21 billion this year. They also show that the Department will be considering over £3 billion of interest payments on student debt as revenue. My hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd), the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, has already shown that the Government’s use of an unreliable inflation measure for these debts costs students around £16,000, and they will now discover that that is being done to line the Treasury’s coffers. Will the Minister tell us how that £3.2 billion is going to be spent? Will he tell us whether the fact that his Department has a vested financial interest in keeping interest rates high means that it will not be acting to address the fact that students are paying more than 6% in interest before they are even able to repay their debts?

It is traditional for the Opposition spokesman to thank Opposition Members for their speeches, but not today. I want to thank all the Government Members for their speeches—[HON. MEMBERS: “Ahh.”] Isn’t that nice of me? The hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Craig Tracey) made a fine speech, but he failed to mention that North Warwickshire Borough Council is losing £12.5 million from its schools budget. We had the most supportive unsupportive speech that I have ever heard in this House from the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr Wragg). He is right to say that Manchester teachers are some of the best in the world—I was one of them—but Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council is losing £5.9 million over the funding period. What a fine speech it was from the hon. Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin). I believe that Horsham is in West Sussex, where primary schools are losing £8.9 million over this Parliament. I have already had it out with the hon. Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) about Derbyshire, which is facing an £11.5 million cut. Who else do we have? The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton)—

Several hon. Members rose—

Mike Kane: I have very little time left. Stoke-on-Trent is having £2.8 million taken away from its budgets. The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), which is in East Sussex, will see £6.4 million of funding removed.

It is eight years since the former Chancellor delivered the first austerity budget. After eight years of cuts and the usual platitudes, can Government Members really say it is working for them and their schools in their constituencies? As we approach the summer recess, I call on them to contemplate what austerity has done to our country and to the schools in their communities. I ask them to think deeply about whether they can continue in all conscience to support their Ministers in this great decimation of our education system.

5.19 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): I start by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) and the hon. Members for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) and for Manchester Central (Lucy Powell) on securing the subject of this estimates debate.

The Government are determined to create an education system that offers opportunities to everyone, at every stage of life, and an effective funding system is a cornerstone of such an education system.

Education funding has been a key priority for this Government, which is why we have been able to maintain core school funding in real terms since 2010, at a time when we have been tackling the historically high budget deficit we inherited from the Labour party. It is only through such a balanced approach to fiscal policy that we have been able to secure a strong economy that provides opportunities for young people, with the highest level of employment and the lowest level of unemployment since the 1970s.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): As the Minister knows, the Government had a manifesto commitment to remove the cap for faith schools, which they decided not to implement. However, they have promised to fund voluntary-aided faith schools 100%. Can he confirm that that pledge stands? What steps is he taking to ensure that money is forthcoming for new voluntary-aided faith schools?

Nick Gibb: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education has said that that is the approach we are taking to assist Catholic schools in particular. We are spending £23 billion on capital funding because of our balanced approach to managing the public finances.

We have made historic reforms to the way we fund our schools, supported by an additional £1.3 billion investment, and we have announced ambitious plans for a new world-class technical education system, backed by £500 million a year of additional funding.

As is clear from this debate, our work as a Department, and our investment in young people, extend far beyond schools and colleges. Members have raised issues relating to priorities across the Department’s remit—from early years to further and higher education—and I aim to address some of those important questions.

Lucy Powell: I thank the Minister for giving way; he did intervene on a number of colleagues during the debate. He champions numeracy, but does he accept that spending power is reduced when costs go up and income remains the same? The number of teachers who can be employed, the amount of training that can be put on and the support that schools can provide has reduced, and budgets have therefore fallen.
Nick Gibb: Of course I acknowledge that, but the hon. Lady also has to acknowledge that school funding is at a record level—£42.4 billion this year, rising to £43.5 billion next year. Of course I acknowledge there are costs that schools have absorbed, and I will come to the measures we have taken to help schools to deal with those rising costs, which include employers’ national insurance contributions. Those costs have been absorbed by the private sector, and they have been incurred across the public sector—public sector pensions have also been an increased cost across Whitehall. We are helping schools to address those issues.

By prioritising frontline spending within the Department’s budget, we have ensured that core funding for schools and high needs has risen over and above the allocations set out at the last spending review. The total core schools and high needs budget will rise from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £43.5 billion by 2019-20.

The hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) mentioned Ofsted, and he pointed out that pupil numbers have increased. Of course he is right, which is why we have created 285,000 new school places since 2010, in contrast with the cut of 100,000 school places under the last Labour Government, despite the increased birth rate being very clear even then.

Sixty-eight per cent. of schools were judged good or outstanding by Ofsted in 2010, compared with 89% today. Although outstanding schools are exempt from routine inspection, Ofsted will trigger an inspection if academic results begin to slide in an outstanding school. The schools and high needs budget will rise from almost £41 billion in 2017-18 to £43.5 billion by 2019-20.

The hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) mentioned Ofsted, and he pointed out that pupil numbers have increased. Of course he is right, which is why we have created 285,000 new school places since 2010, in contrast with the cut of 100,000 school places under the last Labour Government, despite the increased birth rate being very clear even then.

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He is right that longer-term visibility is helpful in every sector, and we are committed to securing the right deal for education in the spending review. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising this important issue. Our track record gives us much to be proud of, but we will of course continue to listen carefully and take into account the issues raised today and the findings of the Education Committee inquiry. Investing in our young people’s future is one of the most important investments that we can make as a country. As a Government, we are committed to getting it right.

Mr Speaker: For the right hon. Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) to be denied at least a minute would seem to be an act of cruelty, and that is unwarranted, so he can certainly have at least a minute.

5.30 pm

Robert Halfon: I thank Members from all parties for speaking on this important matter. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), was kind about my speech, but then said that he preferred textbooks to Tories and compared himself to the England captain; I have to say that Harry Kane is a lot better at scoring goals.

On the general question of education, in the 1970s, we Conservatives often felt that if there was enough economic capital, everything else would be solved. We now realise that we have to build economic capital and social capital hand in hand. I hugely respect my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards. He has built up academic capital, transformed reading in our country and done many good things to improve standards in schools, but we have to concentrate as much on social capital and skills capital as on academic capital. Great social injustices remain in our education system. As Government and Opposition Members have said, we have to deal with early-years injustice and with maintained nursery schools, which were described as the jewel in the crown. We have to deal with the problem of exclusions, with 833 fixed exclusions every day for special needs pupils, and we have to deal with further education. I urge my right hon. Friend to support a 10-year plan for education, just as has been achieved for the NHS.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54).

Mr Speaker: It would be churlish not to mention it at this point in our proceedings, so I will mention that today represents a very special birthday for the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane), was kind about my speech, but then said that he preferred textbooks to Tories and compared himself to the England captain; I have to say that Harry Kane is a lot better at scoring goals.

5.33 pm

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): I thank the Backbench Business Committee for agreeing to schedule this debate, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) for making the application and all the Members from across the House who agreed to back it. My hon. Friend is unwell today, which is why I am here in his place; I hope that Members understand.

As the House would expect, I shall mainly focus my comments on the Scottish context, but I wish first to touch on the other devolved institutions. My Welsh colleagues have often expressed their concerns about how the Barnett formula applies to Wales. The issue was further compounded by the recent cancelling of the Swansea tidal lagoon project, which would have generated significant income for Wales. The reality is that Wales has been badly served by the UK Government.

On Northern Ireland, the main estimates include £410 million arising from the confidence and supply agreement. The SNP has stressed on numerous occasions how shocking it is that the Prime Minister has entered into this grubby deal, giving huge amounts of cash to Northern Ireland just to keep herself and her Government in power. But the biggest problem about the whole deal—apart from the fact that the Tories, with whom we fundamentally disagree, are being propped up by the Democratic Unionist party, with which we have even more fundamental disagreements—is that the money does not generate Barnett consequentials. If Northern Ireland is receiving £1 billion, Scotland should receive £2.9 billion and Wales £1.6 billion. Given that Scotland’s discretionary budget has been cut by 8.1%, or by £2.6 billion, between 2010-11 and 2019-20, I hope that the UK Government will understand why the people of Scotland and of Wales are so deeply unimpressed by their behaviour.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): In addition to the provision of the DUP bung, Wales has lost £1.2 billion, or 7%, since 2010, so we are talking about a 7% real-terms cut. Despite that and despite the myths peddled by the Government, health and social care spending in Wales is still higher per head of population than in England. Does the hon. Lady agree that we should talk in facts and that the real-terms cuts happening in Wales and Scotland are having a real impact on people’s lives?

Kirsty Blackman: I agree. What we should be doing in this debate, and what I will try to do in this debate, is to lay out what the real-terms cuts actually are. We cannot
have constant fudge from the UK Government, whether on the Wales budget or on the Scotland budget. We need to be accurate about how much is being cut from these budgets.

Scotland’s fiscal resource budget has seen a cut of 9.1% over this period, and our total fiscal budget will be cut by 8.4% in real terms. The UK Government have been talking about the Barnett consequentials that are coming to Scotland, but the reality is that most of that money is financial transactions money. Financial transactions cannot be spent on normal day-to-day spending. They cannot be spent on resources for our NHS, for example, because they have to be paid back. This is not real money that the Scottish Government can spend.

We are also seeing a £230 million resource cut in 2018-19, but despite that, the SNP Government at Holyrood continue to protect public services and to invest in measures to unlock innovation and drive increased productivity. On policing, unlike the UK Government, we have not cut the numbers of police. At this point, I would like to congratulate the new Scottish Justice Minister, Humza Yousaf. It is possible that Donald Trump will visit Scotland. I am certainly not a big fan of Donald Trump coming to Scotland, but I am pleased that Humza Yousaf has managed to convince the UK Treasury—I think the Minister for doing this—to provide an extra £5 million to cover the cost of rolling out the red carpet. I do not want Donald Trump to come here anyway, but he has had the hand of welcome extended to him by the Prime Minister, so it is completely reasonable that the UK Government should cover this cost.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): In reference to Donald Trump, the President of the United States, does the hon. Lady not agree that he is one of the single biggest investors in Scotland, whether in the north-east in Aberdeen or in Turnberry in my constituency, where he employs 300 people and has invested more than £200 million? I would welcome Donald Trump to my constituency. Does she agree?

Kirsty Blackman: I do not give a stuff how much Donald Trump has invested in Scotland, because he is separating families, and that far outweighs any good that he has done with the investment that he has made.

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): The hon. Lady has criticised the financial transactions as the means by which the UK Government are delivering extra funding to Scotland, but does she not agree or accept that the Scottish Government have used financial transactions to invest in housing, in vital infrastructure projects and in other business support? It seems to me that she is happy to criticise the UK Government for using this model but is not prepared to accept that the Scottish Government use exactly the same model for their investments.

Kirsty Blackman: I am pleased that the Scottish Government are receiving the financial transactions money. However, the UK Government cannot say that this is money that can be spent on day-to-day spending, because it cannot. The Resolution Foundation has specifically said that it cannot be spent in that way.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con) rose—

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con) rose—

Kirsty Blackman: I will not give way, because I want to make some progress.

That money cannot be spent on day-to-day services such as our NHS.

On the NHS, our Scottish Government have invested an additional £550 million in health and social care. We have increased the health and sport budget by 9.6% in real terms between 2010-11 and 2018-19. In addition, our NHS Scotland staff will be offered a 9% pay rise over the next three years. That is the highest NHS pay uplift offered in the UK, and I am pleased that we can recognise our NHS workers in this way, particularly in the 70th year of the NHS.

At Treasury questions this morning, the Chancellor confirmed that Scotland’s share of the NHS uplift will be £2.27 billion in 2023-24, but the Treasury has not yet confirmed how this uplift will be paid for. Will it require devolved tax hikes, or will there be a cut to Barnett consequentials coming from elsewhere to fund this additional revenue? The people of Scotland need clarity, and it would be most welcome if the Treasury provided that clarity at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Scottish Government are investing more than £3 billion during this Parliament to deliver 50,000 affordable homes, including 35,000 for social rent—an area that had sadly been neglected by the UK Government. Although it is important that there is enough supply so that people can buy homes, it is also important that those who cannot afford to buy homes have secure rents at levels that they can afford.

In my maiden speech, I said that the Scottish Government’s scrapping of the right to buy was one of the most monumental moves that has been made. I was a local councillor for eight years before I did this job, and a phenomenal number of people were waiting for council housing at that time because of the amount of housing stock that had been sold off. The number of people waiting has now reduced in my constituency and in Aberdeen in general, but this has only happened because Aberdeen City Council is now able to invest in building homes without the fear that they will be sold off immediately.

Kirsty Blackman: Many people took advantage of the right to buy, because it was the rule that they could do so. I do not think that people should be allowed to do that, which is why I have supported the Scottish Government’s move. I will not criticise the UK Government for doing this south of the border, but I urge them to look at what is happening in Scotland—particularly with council housing, but also more generally with social rent. This move has improved people’s quality of life, because they are now able to have long-term rentals, secure tenancies and a roof over their heads. I think that that is more important than being able to buy their own homes.
Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am glad that the hon. Lady and her colleagues have been successful in getting this important estimates day debate, but I do have a niggle about some things. I represent a city that has a waiting list for social and council housing of 26,000 people. The Scottish National party has now been in power for over 10 years, during which time that list has doubled, not halved.

Kirsty Blackman: The Labour party was in charge in Holyrood before and could have cancelled the right to buy then, but it sadly did not. Unfortunately, we are trying to undo the legacy of Margaret Thatcher, who put in place the right to buy. We are trying to undo the legacy of the decimation of our council housing stock. The reality is that we can only build houses so quickly, and we are doing our very best. I would like to see the Labour party do a better job, to be honest.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): Does the hon. Lady agree that if people cannot buy council housing, they need to get social housing? Let us give our young people a chance to have a start in life with a new house. Let us start building social housing and creating jobs.

Kirsty Blackman: Of the homes that the Scottish Government are building, 35,000 are for social rent. The reality is that the Scottish Government have put in place a huge number of schemes to allow first-time buyers to get into the housing market, including joint purchase schemes, whereby people go into joint purchases with the Scottish Government. These measures have been incredibly successful in ensuring that people can get a foot on the housing ladder.

At Westminster, politics gets bleaker by the day. As the Tories hark back to the 19th century, our Scottish Government are pressing on with a forward-looking, 21st century agenda to boost innovation and the economy’s productive base. The Scottish Government have set aside resources of £340 million to provide initial capitalisation for the Scottish Investment Bank. Our Scottish Government do not have power over all the levers to generate economic growth, but we are doing what we can to ensure that our economy can keep pace.

In Scotland, 70% of taxpayers are paying less in income tax this year, assuming that their income has not changed. Some 50% of taxpayers in England—those who earn the least—are paying more income tax than they would if they were in Scotland. Despite all the cuts from Westminster—[Interruption.] I am being queried on this, but these are Library figures—I can send them on to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) if he is interested in seeing them. Despite all the cuts from Westminster, Scotland is the fairest-taxed part of the UK.

I want to touch briefly on oil and gas; as an Aberdeen MP, most people would expect me to do so. We welcome the UK Government’s move on transferable tax history. We pushed for that for a very long time—I have been raising it for about two years in this place—but it is coming along too slowly. The more quickly the transferable tax history changes can happen in relation to oil and gas, the better. I understand that they are intended to be in place in November this year. I very much urge the Government not to extend that deadline further back, because the quicker this can happen, the better. The changes ensure that new investment can be made in late-life assets in the North Sea. It is really important that we ensure that this comes forward.

On investment in the North sea, I would very much like the UK Government to ensure that they are fully behind the Oil and Gas Authority’s “Vision 2035”. This is absolutely vital not just for the north-east of Scotland but, more widely, for any companies that are involved in oil and gas and for all the jobs that are supported by that. To be fair to Scottish Conservative Members, they have been very supportive of “Vision 2035” as well, but the more people who talk about it in this place and outside it, the better. We need to be talking about anchoring our supply chain in the north-east of Scotland and throughout the rest of the UK far into the future, so that even once there is no oil and gas left in the North sea, we continue to have that world-class, recognised supply chain and can continue to generate the tax revenues from it.

It would not be a debate in this Parliament if I did not raise Brexit. The threat of leaving the customs union and the single market is undoubtedly the biggest threat to Scotland’s economy, and so to the Scottish Government’s spending power. For the period 2014-20, Scotland received €476 million in European regional development fund money and €465 million in European social fund money. There has been no commitment from the UK Government that they will plug this gap in spending in Scotland after Brexit. In 2016, the EU common agricultural policy supported payments of £490 million in Scotland. Will the Government guarantee that this money beyond 2022? Our farmers need to plan long term about how best to manage their land, and they need clear guarantees.

The convergence uplift moneys of £220 million—as I said, this was mentioned this morning—were supposed to go to people like Scottish hill farmers who are receiving the lowest levels of support in the EU. Unfortunately, because of the way that the UK Government decided to distribute the money, instead of more than 80% coming to Scotland, only 16% came to Scotland. I am very clear that that money should have come to our farmers in Scotland, yet it did not.

Luke Graham: The hon. Lady is talking about farmers’ payments. Does she not recognise that over £150 million has been spent on an IT system that has had no benefit to hill farmers and that farmers’ debt in Scotland is at a record high, not because of Westminster but because of the SNP in Edinburgh?

Kirsty Blackman: I am very sad that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that £160 million of EU funding should have come to Scotland. It is important that Members across the House push for this money to come. It is also really important that it is guaranteed in future years as well and not lost now and therefore lost in future years as well and not lost now and therefore lost.

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Liam Kerr: I am sure that the hon. Lady is aware that the common agricultural policy supported payments have been reduced from £490 million in Scotland to £476 million in the UK Government’s spending power. For the period 2014-20, the UK Government are pressing on with a forward-looking, 21st century agenda to boost innovation and the economy’s productive base. The Scottish Government have set aside resources of £340 million to provide initial capitalisation for the Scottish Investment Bank. Our Scottish Government do not have power over all the levers to generate economic growth, but we are doing what we can to ensure that our economy can keep pace.
Scotland’s universities are world-leading. They generate wealth for our economy, support innovation and increase productivity, but they rely on close links with EU countries. Changes to their funding and collaboration structures could have a devastating effect and wide-ranging economic consequences.

But there are further threats from Brexit, and I want to highlight two. The first is the reduction in immigration from EU citizens that is likely to hit us. This is a problem not just in that it will reduce our cultural diversity and the richness of our society, but in that it will have a direct impact on tax generation. If we cannot attract migrants to live and work in Scotland, we cannot grow our tax base, and we will not have enough workers to support our ageing population.

Every week in my office, I speak to people from outside the EU who have been hit by the UK Government’s immigration policies. Many of them are particularly high earners and have paid a huge amount of tax into the UK Government’s coffers over the years, yet they are being denied the right to stay in the UK. The loss of the post-study work visa also means that the brightest and best cannot stay in Scotland. I am concerned that the system for EU migrants will become as bad as the system for non-EU migrants and that we will exclude highly skilled workers from outside the EU—I will get towards the end of my remarks shortly, Mr Speaker; I can see you getting a bit antsy.

I am really concerned about this. I am constantly shocked that the UK Government believe that making it more difficult to move here will help. They need to be honest with the general population about the fact that migration brings benefits in terms of tax revenues, and more Conservative Members could do with standing up and saying that more often, so that we can take better decisions about immigration. We expect to discuss the Trade Bill and the customs Bill in this place before the summer recess. I cannot make it any clearer to the UK Government: leaving the single market and the customs union is an economic catastrophe. Tariff barriers and non-tariff barriers will have a drastic effect on any company that exports to not just the EU but countries that the EU has trade deals with.

The UK Government are mismanaging Brexit, just as they are mismanaging grants to the devolved institutions. Scotland would be far better off if we were an independent country. If we had the levers to close, the Montrose maternity unit to be shut down and Brechin infirmary to go and at every turn has overlooked closures of centres across the country. In Angus, she has allowed the excellent Mulberry ward to close, the Montrose maternity unit to be shut down and Brechin infirmary to go and at every turn has prioritised centralisation over local services; my list could go on. The SNP are experts at shouting from the sidelines, but this extra funding is a test of their commitment to our NHS. I urge them to show the people of Scotland that they can act in the national interest by committing £2 billion to Scotland’s health service.

Mr Speaker: Commendably brief!

5.54 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I cannot promise to be equally brief, but I will endeavour to stick to the six-minute limit. It is a pleasure to speak about bread and butter issues—the Barnett formula, Barnett consequentials. Welsh funding—considering that we seem to have been talking entirely about Brexit for the past two or three years.
The Welsh Government total departmental expenditure limit budget sought for 2018-19 is £15.827 billion, a reduction of 3.3% in both resource and capital budgets compared with last year’s final budget. I understand that this reduction has primarily arisen because last year’s revised budget included £300 million of additional funds for student loan impairments, and £278 million carried over from the previous year, neither of which has been repeated. It is also down £269 million because of the block grant adjustments arising from the devolution of stamp duty and landfill tax.

I acknowledge the fact that some significant adjustments have been made, but compared with the original spending review settlement plans for 2018-19, which include £18 million extra for the Cardiff and Swansea city deals, I would argue that the estimates in front of us are symptomatic of a negligent Westminster Government, with a comatose Secretary of State for Wales. Where is the money for the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon project, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeenshire North (Kirsty Blackman)? Where is the money for rail electrification? Rail experts calculate that it would now cost only £150 million to electrify the line between Swansea and Cardiff, Wales’s two largest cities, in a stand-alone project. This compares with a cost of £400 million per mile for HS2, so the whole project in south Wales could be delivered for less than the cost of a third of a mile of HS2.

When it comes to the Swansea Bay city deal, 90% of the money is Welsh public and private money, yet the British Government are propagandising in the west of my country about how they are about to spend £1 billion in our communities. As it happens, that project is being delivered by Plaid Cymru-led Carmarthenshire County Council, definitely not by the British Government. The excuses given by the Secretary of State for Wales when delivering the bad news centre on the projects not being good value for money for the taxpayer. It is very disappointing that the Secretary of State believes that, and some might really question whether the £4.6 million investment for the Wales Office, which is included in the estimates, is value for money.

There is an adjustment of £16 million because of the 5% uplift on the Barnett consequential in the Welsh fiscal framework. For the first time—this is to be welcomed—a needs-based factor has been added to the calculation in these estimates with the aim of ensuring that Welsh funding converges to a level based on the needs of our country. However, we are still left languishing compared with Scotland and Northern Ireland. Welsh public funding per head will be about £10,076, but in Scotland the figure is £10,651 and in Northern Ireland it is £11,042, which is before we start talking about the £1 billion bung for Northern Ireland. Welsh funding per head also languishes behind that for London, where the figure is £10,192. Wales is certainly getting the bad end of the stick. As David Phillips of the Institute for Fiscal Studies argues:

“Although the inclusion of a need-based element in the Barnett formula is to be welcomed, the agreement makes no provision for updating the assessment of relative need in future. Even at the point of introduction the calculation will be based on an already decade old assessment. This could become a source of tension, if it emerges Wales’s relative need is changing, and the agreement is therefore unlikely to end debate around Wales’s fiscal framework.”

Following the devolution of stamp duty and landfill tax this year and the partial devolution of income tax in April 2019, the Welsh Government and our local authorities—through business rates and domestic rates—will control nearly £5 billion of tax revenues, which equates to about 30% of the combined spending of the Welsh Government and local authorities. However, this is far less than the fiscal power available to Scotland and Northern Ireland. While the Welsh budget will be largely protected from UK-wide economic shocks, by means of the block grant adjustment mechanism agreed in the new fiscal framework, devolved revenues will need to keep pace with comparable revenues in the rest of the UK to avoid a shortfall in the Welsh budget. As Guto Ifan recently wrote in relation to his report for the Wales Governance Centre:

“Increased transparency and budgetary information on the underlying block grant, devolved revenues and the adjustments made for tax devolution will be crucial in boosting fiscal accountability and aiding understanding of annual changes to the budget.”

I welcome the fact that we have got to the point where the Welsh Government now have to raise their own revenue to spend on public services; that will incentivise them to consider programmes that develop the Welsh economy—at the moment, of course, they are in a way a spending body.

However, if the formula is to be based on population growth, there is going to be an issue. Even if we turned around the Welsh economy so that it was performing better than the UK economy, which should result in better revenues, there might be no net benefit because our population would be likely to lag behind. That cannot be right: we cannot be running a population-based revenue-related risk. We must look at that again, and I would be grateful if the Treasury agreed. This comes back to the argument made by the hon. Member for Aberdeen North: in the post-Brexit environment, if the formula is to decide the funding available to our respective nations, devolved power over immigration will be important for Wales and Scotland.

The lack of transparency and accountability in Welsh funding could be a problem in the long term. The promised boost in funding to NHS England is a case in point. The British Government have set out their estimated Barnett consequentials for the Welsh Government as a result of the extra £20 billion per annum for NHS England by 2023-24. However, those are yet to be finalised and we are none the wiser as to exactly how the uplift will be funded in England by increases in tax—and how that will impact on Wales, once income tax is devolved in April 2020. I hope that on the Treasury Bench will explain exactly how that is going to work.

Although partly devolving income tax is an important step towards fiscal accountability and responsibility, Plaid Cymru has always advocated for the full powers over income tax that are being made available to Scotland—especially the power to set our own bands. Following the UK’s departure from the European Union, there will be no legal or legislative barriers to the Westminster Government’s devolving taxation powers that would allow each nation of the British state to have the fiscal arrangements that suited its needs—not those of domineering London and the south-east of England.

We need to consider devolving three key taxes following Brexit: VAT, corporation tax and air passenger duty. VAT is particularly important to the Welsh economy.
Welsh VAT revenues have been far more resilient than any other major taxes, with about £5.2 billion raised in 2014-15. VAT has become the largest fiscal source of revenue in Wales and performed far higher than the UK average; in contrast, income tax remains the dominant tax in the rest of the UK. VAT would be a very good tax to devolve to Wales.

Luke Graham: The hon. Gentleman is talking about VAT. Given that VAT is a regressive tax, is his party’s position to increase VAT in Wales?

Jonathan Edwards: The hon. Gentleman has brought to mind my recent visit to the United States: in every state there, sales tax is devolved. The argument is clear. If a tax is performing well in the UK context, it would be good to devolve it to Wales.

The Holtham commission recognised the immense benefits of devolving corporation tax in its 2010 report on finances in Wales. It argued that corporation tax devolution could be a critical part of the transformational change that the Welsh economy needs. Corporation tax has been devolved to Northern Ireland, and the Silk commission said in its report that there was no reason why that should not also apply to Wales. Our problem is that whereas Scotland and Northern Ireland have a range of fiscal powers, the Welsh fiscal portfolio is far weaker, which means that Wales is going to be at a competitive disadvantage within the UK.

Long-haul air passenger duty, of course, is another tax that has been devolved to Scotland and Northern Ireland. That means that the competitiveness of our publicly owned airport in Wales is being held back. Bristol airport opposes the devolution of the tax to Wales and that trumps what is in the best interests of the Welsh economy. The Welsh Government, of course, have no say over the ability of Bristol airport to build a second terminal. That will have a devastating effect on Cardiff airport.

Across the British state as a whole, devolved funding arrangements look increasingly asymmetric and ad hoc. There will now be significant differences in the scale and composition of devolved and reserved taxes across each country: how their block grants are determined and adjusted over time, and the borrowing and budget management capacity of each devolved Government. The British state is changing quickly and we will have to new structures to manage those changes. With Brexit on our doorstep, the case has never been greater for an independent commission, similar to the Australian Commonwealth Grants Commission, to carry out an assessment of relative need, undertake periodic reviews, arbitrate between tax disputes, and collect and publish information on an annual basis about the allocation of finances and funding to the devolved Administrations. We cannot have a situation where the Treasury is judge and jury.

I would like to finish by talking about the UK shared prosperity fund, which has been a major source of income for investment infrastructure in Wales. Convergence funding between 2014 and 2020 is worth £2 billion. Despite it being two years since the referendum result, there is still no clarity from the British Government on how that fund will work and how funds will be allocated. That will be a major issue for Wales and we will be pressing the British Government on it.

If the British state is to survive post Brexit, it will require radical restructuring and fiscal policy will be a key element in that. The estimates debate is probably not the right time to make those arguments, but I look forward to putting forward suggestions in the months to come.

6.6 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I am shocked—shocked that a debate entitled, “Spending decisions of HM Treasury and their consequences for grants to the devolved institutions” could muster just one Scottish National party speaker. The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) and the SNP Chief Whip sitting in the corner, out of a parliamentary group of 35 MPs, is all they can muster. The hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) has just rightly said that this is a debate about bread and butter issues that he is happy to be debating, yet other nationalists in this place seem to be happy to be absent.

I will be looking very closely tomorrow at the SNP Opposition day debate on the claim of right for Scotland: yet another argument in this place about constitutional matters. Will the SNP Benches be so sparsely populated for a debate on the claim of right for Scotland as they are tonight about the money we spend in Scotland and the public services we get? I think my constituents and people across Scotland will wonder why they send SNP representatives down to Westminster if they cannot even turn up to a debate about spending in the devolved Administrations.

This is an important debate that affects all our constituencies across Scotland and Wales. It is about the money we put forward in Westminster to be spent in the devolved Administrations. I want to pick up on points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair). My NHS area is suffering at the moment. NHS Grampian is one of the poorest funded health boards anywhere in Scotland. I continually receive complaints about local healthcare and waiting lists. In fact, I wrote to the acting chief executive today about someone who has to wait up to two years for an ear, nose and throat check for nosebleeds that stop her leaving her home, because she is so worried about having another severe nosebleed. When she went to the NHS in Scotland, they said, “You can go privately and get it done within a week or two.” But NHS Scotland, overseen by the SNP for the past 11 years, says she has to wait up to two years. That is not acceptable to my constituents or to anyone else.

I note that the two SNP Members in the Chamber are not intervening to say that that is wrong. They know that after 11 years, under a First Minister who was previously Health Secretary, another Health Secretary who was her friend, and now a new Health Secretary, health in Scotland is suffering because the SNP is performing poorly in this area despite significant investment by the UK Government. We have already heard that £2 billion extra has been invested in Scotland as a result of last year’s Budget. By 2020, the block grant will have grown to over £31.1 billion: £31.1 billion is going to the SNP Government in Scotland and the way they are spending it is letting us down.

Stephen Kerr: Will my hon. Friend confirm that because of our hard-nosed lobbying of the Treasury,
the £2 billion that was dismissed as not real money is very much real money, and it is investment in Scotland that we badly need?

Douglas Ross: Absolutely. The Chancellor said at the Dispatch Box during that Budget debate that his ear had been bent by the Scottish Conservatives. It was not bent by the SNP—not surprising, because they do not seem to turn up to debates about the economy in Scotland. It was the work of the Scottish Conservative MPs, working alongside our Ministers within Government, that achieved that for Scotland. The resource budget in Scotland has gone up by almost £100 million in the last year. Those real-term changes are positively impacting on people in Scotland and all we get from the SNP are more and more complaints.

I know that time is short, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I was interested that in the 20 minutes that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North spent introducing the debate, there was no mention of the recent reshuffle. This is important when we talk about the money that goes to Scotland to spend on the devolved Administration. She did not mention that in a decade of the SNP being in power in Scotland, the number of Ministers has gone from 16 to 26. The cost of Ministers in Scotland has gone up by £400 million. That does not include the extra funding that will go to their private offices or on their car hire. I notice that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) has just come in. Clearly, a message has gone out—"We must get more people on our Benches." They have now gone up to three, and it will be interesting to see his contribution to the debate.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Is it not also the case that as the ministerial burden has increased with the SNP Government, there has been a 10% cut to our councils in Scotland over the last eight years, which has caused huge problems to individuals and our constituents?

Douglas Ross: Absolutely, and I want to finish on that point because it is important. My Moray Council has suffered one of the biggest funding reductions of all councils anywhere in Scotland. When the SNP in Scotland gets more money from Westminster, it spends less on our health service. It spends less on our local councils and it spends more on giving 42% of all SNP MSPs a job in Government. If that is what we get after 11 years in power from the SNP, the next election cannot come quickly enough.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out some home truths, but could we not sum up his speech and that of the hon. Member for Angus (Kirsty Blackman) by saying that the UK Conservative Government is addicted to austerity, and that the SNP Scottish Government is addicted to austerity?

Douglas Ross: That is amazing from a Member of the party that brought about the collapse in the financial markets, which is why we have had to have good governance of our finances in this country—to deal with the mess left behind by Labour.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): rose—
As my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) said, about one third of the 2018-19 budget went on health and sport, but one of the next biggest areas of funding is finance and the constitution, where 11.8% of the budget is being spent. Now, finance and the constitution are all perfectly fine and important things, if they want to make those choices, but it is more relevant when we consider the percentage of spending that goes on education and skills, which is 8.4%. The No. 1 priority for the SNP Administration only gets 8.4% of the funding, versus the—wait for it—12.4% from the Westminster Government that goes on education and skills.

Stephen Kerr rose—

Luke Graham: It is the SNP Government’s No. 1 priority and yet our schools are plunging in the international rankings. I give way to my hon. Friend.

Stephen Kerr: My hon. Friend has pre-empted my point. Will he remind the House what has happened to Scottish education in the last 11 years under this SNP Scottish Government?

Luke Graham: The performance has been lamentable. Scotland’s schools have fallen in the rankings in reading, mathematics and science. We have gone from No. 1 in the UK to No. 3. Scottish education, which was once a byword for excellence in the world, is now merely ranked as average in most international tables. That is not doing Scotland down; it is recognising a problem because we want to solve it.

I am conscious of time so I will come to my last point. We have all heard of “tax and spend” Governments, but we rarely hear of “tax and underspend” Governments, yet that is what we have in Edinburgh. In 2017-18, the Government underspent by £453 million. The Finance Secretary in Edinburgh says, “This is all part of a plan. It is normal to underspend on your budget.” I think the Chief Secretary to the Treasury would probably say it is not normal for Departments to lobby to underspend on their budgets; in fact, they want to meet or exceed those budgets.

This underspend covers £66 million for volatility; £100 million for a new social security system—in fact of actually working with the UK Government to build a better devolved social security system; and £50 million from better tax receipts that they are not refunding or reinvesting in Scottish local authorities. This would be bad in one year, but it is in addition to the £191 million underspend from the previous year. The SNP continues to scream for more powers and spending, and yet when it receives the powers, it does not use them, and when it sees the money, it does not spend it.

My constituents are fed up with the mismanagement of the SNP. That is why we Scottish Conservatives have stood here tonight. Why is it that, despite more money going from Westminster to Edinburgh, we still face cuts to our local council services, in Clackmannanshire and in Perth and Kinross, cuts to music education, cuts to support services for disabled people, cuts in infrastructure, cuts to our roads and paths—[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) wants to make an intervention, he is more than welcome to do so. [Interruption.] Oh yes, I am conscious of time so I will not give way. It is time for the SNP to take account of the money it receives and to take responsibility for the budgets it receives from Westminster; it is not time for my constituents to carry on paying for the mismanagement of the SNP.

6.18 pm

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): I rise to speak as a Conservative MP proud of what my Government are doing and delivering for Scotland. Thanks to this Conservative Government, by 2020, the block grant to the Scottish Government will have grown to £31.1 billion—a real-terms increase over the spending review period; thanks to this Conservative Government, day-to-day spending in Scotland will increase by £500 million; thanks to this Conservative Government, the capital budget, which is used for crucial investment in Scotland, will increase by £566 million; and thanks to this Conservative Government, and their commitment to investing in our national health service, Scotland will now receive an extra £2.27 billion in real terms. A Conservative Government are governing and delivering for the whole United Kingdom, including Scotland.

But what do we hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman)—and I use the word “friend” sincerely? We hear no acknowledgement that Scotland is the second highest per capita-funded nation in the UK, no acknowledgement of the huge spending boost delivered in last year’s Budget; no acknowledgement—and I am surprised at this—of the £18 million delivered for the Aberdeen city region deal, the £20 million delivered for the Edinburgh city region deal, or the £8 million delivered for the Inverness city region deal. No, what we hear instead is the Scottish National party, and the Administration in Holyrood, bemoaning the fact that the extra £2 billion delivered in last year’s Budget is somehow a con, because the money is financial transactions capital funding.

Kirsty Blackman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew Bowie: I should be delighted.

Kirsty Blackman: I was very pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman mention the Aberdeen city region deal. I was a huge supporter of it. Indeed, I initiated an Adjournment debate on that very subject during my first few weeks as an MP. Does he not recognise, however, that the Scottish Government are providing more funds for the deal than the UK Government? Will he push the UK Government to match the Scottish Government’s funding?

Andrew Bowie: I welcome the contribution of the Scottish Government to the Aberdeen city region deal, but the hon. Lady must acknowledge that the deal would not have happened if the UK Government had not driven it ahead.

For goodness sake, give me strength. The argument about the financial transactions capital funding is ridiculous not only because, let’s face it, the Scottish people do not care what type of money they are getting as long as the Government spend it in a way that can benefit them and their communities, but because the Scottish Government have themselves used that type of funding for affordable housing, business investment and infrastructure projects. But then, consistency has never been the watchword of the Scottish National party.
Indeed, why allow the focus to fall on how the money is being spent? It is much easier to concoct the false narrative that Westminster is doing Scotland down and short-changing it; that the reason NHS Tayside and Grampian are in crisis, the reason Police Scotland is failing, the reason for the state of the management of education north of the border—when are we going to see that education Bill?—is that, somehow, the Tories are underfunding Scotland. That, say SNP Members, is why they are having to raise income tax; that is why they are forcing councils to raise council tax, making Scotland the highest-taxed part of the UK and Aberdeenshire—forever the Scottish Government’s cash cow—the highest-taxed part of Scotland.

In fact, none of the problems facing Scotland in 2018 is due to underfunding from this Government at Westminster. They are all due to the incompetence of the Scottish Government, who could not organise—well, a tea party in a café. While moaning about not getting enough money, and while punishing the hard-working people of Scotland by raising their taxes, the Scottish Government actually underspent their budget by half a billion pounds last year. But that is not the worst of it. Not only are they not spending the money that they already have; not only have they ensured that Scottish workers keep less of their salaries than their English and Welsh colleagues; most disgracefully of all, they are spending money hand over fist on the biggest and most bloated Executive that Scotland has ever seen.

The new SNP Government at Holyrood is truly gargantuan. At present, 42% of SNP MSPs are on Nicola Sturgeon’s payroll. Talk about buying patronage! Please do not do any more of it, or the Government Whips might get some ideas. There are more Ministers than there ever were when Alex Salmond was First Minister, and he was not someone who ever sold himself short. The SNP Government have twice as many Cabinet Ministers drawing salaries as Alex Salmond had in his Government in 2007.

It is clear, at the end of the day, that it is the Conservatives who are delivering for Scotland. The SNP should spend less time complaining, less time giving jobs to the boys and girls, and more time governing. The conversation that we should be having now is about how we can best spend this dividend to improve Scotland’s services. So let us see an end to the grievance politics and the “it’s not fair, it’s not right!” narrative. Let us work together and build a better Scotland, inside a stronger United Kingdom.

6.23 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It seems to me that we often get carried away when we speak about money in this place. We speak about giving an extra couple of billion here, or an extra 10 million there. For most people—and I include myself in their number—such amounts are hard to imagine.

When we examine the figure of £453 million, we can come up with some interesting statistics. If £453 million were paid in pound coins, it would weigh 9.5 tonnes, and would stack into a pile almost 2 miles high. The total budget for the Forth Valley health board, which covers my constituency in Clackmannanshire and Falkirk, is about that amount, and it is more than twice the budget for council services in my constituency. For that amount, every one of my constituents could be educated, have their bins picked up and have their roads repaired for two years. That is the size of the Scottish Government underspend. I will say that again: this is the amount of money that was allocated to them and was not spent.

The SNP does not like that figure to be discussed and generally disseminated; it resists scrutiny, undermines Scottish parliamentary committees, and has subverted the freedom of information process in Scotland. But it is right during this debate that we speak about the services that could have been provided with the money allocated for the last financial year had it been spent—the healthcare that could have been provided to the sick, the educational equipment that could have been bought for our students, and the roads that could have been fixed or repaired for our motorists by the Scottish Government. The Scottish taxpayer is now the highest taxed of all taxpayers in these islands.

Of course, I defend the right of the SNP Scottish Government to set their spending priorities according to the priorities they have set for that Government. That is their prerogative. The devolved Government can and must reflect the different needs of Scotland. But it is right to throw a spotlight on the mismanagement of the public finances in Scotland and ask questions about the services being cut around Scotland while Derek Mackay runs up a huge Government surplus.

This comes at a time when councils are increasingly dipping into their reserves, and that is a direct consequence of SNP budget cuts. A recent Scottish Government report reveals that in 2017-18 councils spent £126 million from their reserves and this coming year it is predicted that councils will need to call on an additional £113 million-worth of reserves. These reserves are not being used for landmark projects; it is a last resort to keep day-to-day services going.

This might seem like a small issue, but to my constituents who contacted me it is a big deal. I am speaking now of the Stirling play bus. It is an old bus that many children in Stirling and the surrounding district for the past few decades had enjoyed. It went around Stirling, right into the most remote villages and into the heart of the some of the most deprived communities in my constituency. It was a place to play when the weather was not so good and it gave kids a place to go during the summer. The bus was, sadly, scrapped this year having finally given up the ghost. Stirling Council—an SNP and Labour-run council since last year—took the opportunity to reduce play services and remove all mobile provision of this kind, as a cost saving by a council strapped for cash.

It is shocking that this should happen while the Government of Scotland run up a surplus of half a billion pounds. I know Members from across Scotland will have many hundreds of such examples and I could go into many more myself; this will take some explaining on the part of the SNP Scottish Government.

As has been widely reported, the Scottish Fiscal Commission is forecasting that the Scottish Government are facing a £1.7 billion shortfall in public finances over the next five years, as Scotland’s economy lags behind the rest of the UK, with growth remaining below 1% a year until 2023. As my good friend and colleague Murdo Fraser MSP said:

“Derek Mackay might like to fool us all into thinking this £453 million underspend figure is an insignificant sum. But it’s higher than what the SNP’s independence blueprint”—the growth commission—
“said it would cost to create a separate state. The finance secretary is having to put money aside to meet a projected shortfall in tax revenues due to Scottish economic underperformance.”

Those are the words of Murdo Fraser, and I concur with them.

In the minute I have remaining to me I would like to raise an issue pertinent to my Stirling constituency specifically: the governance of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is answering this debate because she played no small part in delivering the city deal for Stirling and Clackmannanshire. For that we on these Benches are indebted and very grateful. But I am concerned about the governance that is prescribed for a city deal. I hope she will be able to reassure us that the approach for the governance of the city deal will be pragmatic—that it will be light touch—and will not be left at the mercy of a bureaucratic system of committees and joint boards. I wonder whether having the deal anchored within a council is the best way to achieve what we are striving to achieve. I do not want the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal to find itself in the category of city deals described in a recent FSB Scotland briefing, which welcomed the city deals but questioned their “lack of engagement with smaller businesses” and the “lack of transparency inherent within the deals”.

I look forward to hearing what my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury—and she truly is a right hon. Friend to Scotland—will have to say in response to that specific concern.

6.30 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I understand that there are hordes of people around London this evening looking for 90 minutes of entertainment on a green playing field, and where better to look than the House of Commons? We have been thoroughly entertained already and I am sure that there is nothing else in this evening’s line-up that could be as interesting. I want to start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) on securing this debate, and the Backbench Business Committee and the Liaison Committee on securing the time for this debate, and the Backbench Business Committee on delivering the city deal for Stirling and Clackmannanshire.

I have spoken in estimates day debates before and been called out of order for daring to actually discuss the estimates, so it is very helpful indeed to be able to have this discussion on Government spending. The reason that we have these debates is that the SNP questioned the estimates process in the context of the English votes for English laws process. We were told by the then Leader of the House, who is now the Transport Secretary, that if we wanted to have a say and a vote on spending as it affected Scotland, the estimates process was the way to do so. As we have been so ably encouraged by Conservative Members to take that opportunity this evening, I am sure that they will look forward to that happening at 7 o’clock and in the time that follows.

In summing up, it would be only fair to address the points that have been raised by Conservative Members. The hon. Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) was interested in health and in the Barnett consequentials that will allegedly come as a result of the £20 billion increase in expenditure for the health service. It is great to know that they are coming, and the Scottish Government have consistently said in successive manifestos that they will pass on all the Barnett consequentials that they receive for health. The question is: where is the funding coming from? It was supposed to be coming from a Brexit dividend, but it now appears that it will come from increased taxation or perhaps from cuts to other Departments. However, if other Departments are cut to fund health spending, there will be cuts to the Barnett consequentials as well.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): To give the House an example, the NHS in England got £337 million for winter pressures last year, but what finally made it over the border was not the expected £32 million but £8.4 million, for exactly that reason.

Patrick Grady: Exactly. I do not know how many Scottish Tories took part in the health estimates debate last night, but I know for a fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Central Ayrshire (Dr Whitford) did so. Again, we will take no lessons on attendance in this Chamber.

I say to the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) that if he is so keen to debate the Scottish national health service, perhaps he should go back to where he came from: the Scottish Parliament, which makes the decisions about health. And if he is concerned about the payroll vote, he might want to take note of the fact that the current Prime Minister has the largest Government since 1979. I will take no lessons on bloated Government from Members on the other side of the House.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Why are there no protestations from the party opposite about Lord Duncan of Springbank, who was defeated at the general election and then stuffed into the House of Lords?

Patrick Grady: Precisely. If we want to talk about wasting public expenditure, we have only to look up the corridor.

The hon. Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) was quoting from his Whip’s note about what financial transactions money was being spent on, but he neglected to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen North pointed out at the very
Patrick Grady: I do not think that intervening would be wise. The hon. Gentleman should probably take a seat.

We just have to compare the system in this House with the system in Scotland. Here, we have 90 minutes of debate, but the Scottish Parliament has months of decision making. Tomorrow, in less than 30 seconds, the Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) (No. 2) Bill, which has not even been published yet, will be nodded through, authorising billions of pounds-worth of expenditure without any real scrutiny whatsoever.

I cannot finish without talking about the other consequence for devolved institutions. It is the elephant in the room, the canary in the coal mine, or whatever metaphor we please: the dodgy deal, the grubby agreement, the confidence and supply arrangement that has propped up this weak Government for over a year in return for £1.5 billion that we cannot scrutinise and is almost impossible to find anywhere in the estimates document. The debates yesterday and today and the Bill tomorrow are literally the supply element of confidence and supply, but getting to the bottom of the deal is almost impenetrable. All the Library briefing note can find is a line about health buried somewhere. If I was in the DUP, first of all I would be here, but I might also be starting to feel slightly aggrieved about whether the money is ever actually going to show.

However, at least that money has been promised. The real disgrace of the confidence and supply arrangement is that Barnett consequentials are not being made available to the other devolved institutions. We have seen the contempt in which the UK Government hold the devolution settlement these days. They ripped up the Sewel convention to pass the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill without a legislative consent motion from Scotland. In fact, that contempt has been clear since they have shown total disregard for the Barnett formula. No matter what vows were made in 2014, it seems that the conventions and formulae that have underpinned devolution for the past 20 years are slowly but surely being undone. There we are.

We have heard the reality of Tory austerity, which has always been an ideological choice, not a necessity. It has meant real-terms cuts to the discretionary budget in Scotland. We heard the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards) speak of the struggles in Wales, which has been dealt the double whammy of Tory austerity and Labour incompetence. We wonder where and when there will ever be a proper chance for scrutiny of the confidence and supply deal that is propping up this Government at the cost of £1.5 billion, which has been delivered without the due consequentials elsewhere.

I know that, unaccountably, the attention of other Members might be somewhere else at 7 o’clock, but we in the SNP are left with no choice but to divide the House on the estimates.

6.40 pm

Peter Dowd (Bootle) (Lab): I am not quite sure whether I need a wee dram after that speech by the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). We have moved from the turgid to the ranting in one fell swoop, and it got the point where I was looking forward to the Chief Secretary’s speech, which takes something.
I will not regurgitate what has been said, because I could not make head nor tail of it, quite frankly, and I do not suspect the Members who made those speeches could, either. These debates come on the eighth anniversary of the Conservatives’ first austerity Budget, and we are still seeing the effects of that pernicious and ill-informed policy in these estimates.

Back in 2010, the then Chancellor outlined a package of cuts worth £81 billion, to be rolled out gradually, with many still to take effect during this Parliament. There has been an absolute decimation of the public realm, and the vast contraction in spending has had devastating social consequences. A cash-starved NHS is at crisis point; social care has been forgotten and ignored; there has been the longest fall in living standards since records began; and the Office for Budget Responsibility is saying that wages will stagnate for another two decades. Meanwhile, swing voting to the regions have left the UK more unequal.

Today, the Local Government Association published a report showing that local authorities will have had £16 billion cut from their core funding by the end of the decade, leading to a £7.8 billion funding gap by 2025. When Conservative Members call for special consideration, I remind them that they all supported those decisions, with no dissent, year in, year out. With no codicils and no caveats, they supported every one of those spending cuts. They are now complaining and saying that they need their communities back up and running. Quite simply, they voted for these cuts in their own areas, and they should have the guts and the backbone to admit it.

Those cuts helped to create a sense of hopelessness and destitution in many places across the UK, one which no doubt contributed to the Brexit vote a few years after Mr Osborne’s slash-and-burn Budget. It is very strange that, after pursuing this unpopular and ineffective programme, cutting Department after Department, the Prime Minister managed to find enough cash to buy the support of the Democratic Unionist party. It is regrettable that DUP Members are not here today, but the fact is that the DUP should not have had to ask in the first place.

Yes, ironically, the Prime Minister sprouted the magic money tree in the rose garden of No. 10 on the very spot where the giggleing David and Nick shook hands on the austerity deal. Indeed, £410 million of that deal is included in these estimates, with some £590 million left to be allocated. Perhaps the Chief Secretary could tell the House when the remaining millions promised to the DUP will be put before Parliament.

We have no issue with the funding of Northern Ireland. After all, following eight years of austerity, 370,000 people there are now living in poverty. What we object to is the Government telling the public during an election campaign that there is no fiscal headroom for investment, before immediately finding a £1 billion windfall to keep themselves in power. Unfortunately, the other devolved nations have not been privy to similar arrangements, as they could not afford to offer the Prime Minister continued tenure in office in return.

Looking north of the English border, the Scotland Office sees a significant reduction in its departmental budget. I also note that some spending has been allocated for city deals in Edinburgh, Inverness and Aberdeen. Alongside that funding, perhaps the Chief Secretary can tell us how much money the UK Government will invest in the new or recently signed city deals in Scotland, such as the Stirling and Clackmannanshire deal. Will she give us more details on the Glasgow and Clyde Valley city deal by updating us, for example, on whether there will be any additional Government funding for that deal, particularly for infrastructure projects?

Turning to Wales, the cash grant proposed for the devolved Welsh Government is 2% lower than the amount they received last year and comes at a time of unprecedented austerity for Wales. The Welsh Labour Government’s budget will be 7% lower in real terms by the end of the decade than it was in 2010-11 as a result of the UK Government’s cuts. That means there is £1.2 billion less to spend on public services. As with Scotland, this is the first financial year the Welsh Government have been given greater control over taxation. The Wales Act 2017 and the Welsh fiscal framework devolved stamp duty and landfill tax to the Welsh Government. Responding to that, the Government have reduced the block grant by £269 million to reflect changes to the amount of tax revenue the Welsh Government now collect directly.

Although the devolution of Welsh taxes is welcome, Labour is the real party of devolution and wants to ensure that the Welsh Government have a greater level of fiscal autonomy and financial self-determination. However, this also puts Wales in a vulnerable position. Welsh taxes will need to grow as fast as those in the rest of England to keep up with the block grant. In the case of stamp duty, which has been replaced by a land transaction tax, Wales has received no agreement from the Government to protect any fall in revenue. That is particularly concerning given the deep-rooted differences in UK property market conditions, especially after Brexit, which risk leaving the Welsh Government exposed to risks that are outside their control. In addition, Wales’s slower population growth may lead to slower revenue growth than in the other nations of the UK.

The Opposition are also concerned by the method that has been agreed upon to determine how the Welsh block grant is cut. The comparable model means that Wales will lose out even if revenues per head grow at the same rate as everywhere else in the UK. When offered the same method, the Scottish Government rejected it outright, and the Welsh Government agreed to it only after the Treasury agreed to a Welsh needs-based factor being included in the Barnett formula.

So although the Government’s recognition of the Welsh population’s higher needs is a welcome step, the uprating of Barnett consequentials to reflect the high need must also be closely monitored. The transitional uprating of 5% and the agreed funding floor of 15% should not be considered a fait accompli by the Treasury. Instead, both rates should be regularly reviewed by this House and the Welsh Assembly, and, where necessary, uprated.

The day-to-day spending budget for the Welsh Government is yet another casualty in the Government’s continued austerity programme. The Welsh Government this year will see a 3.3% reduction in both their capital and resource budget compared to the last year’s capital budget. The reality is that the Treasury is pulling the rug from under the Welsh Government by demanding that they do more with less. It is the same old story that we
have seen played out time and again, for example, in relation to local government in the UK. Ministers have cynically devolved taxation as a means to also devolve their austerity agenda. That is another case of the Tories not having the courage of their convictions; it is all a charade and an illusion. Financial settlements are dressed up, but in the end Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will inevitably find that they have less. Those nations deserve better from the Government; they deserve a better deal, one that is fair. With these estimates, they are not getting that deal and, to use the words of the Chief Secretary, “That’s a disgrace”.

6.48 pm

*The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Elizabeth Truss):*
We have had a fantastic debate, in which we have heard from some of our top talents from right across the House. I thank the hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) for opening the debate and the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) for his contributions. Sadly, however, we again heard the tales of doom and gloom, and projections of difficulty, whereas when we look at what is happening around Britain and at the UK economy, we see there is a positive story. We have record levels of employment and of new businesses set up, and exports are going up right across the UK. All that comes while we have had to deal with the legacy of the previous Labour Government, who left this country in crisis. We have managed to reduce the deficit that they left us by three quarters. It is because of our stewardship of the economy that we have been able to make sure that the devolved Administrations throughout the UK received more money in the most recent Budget, which contained £2 billion for Scotland, £1.2 billion for Wales and £660 million for Northern Ireland.

We have heard some absolutely fantastic speeches in this debate, particularly from the Scottish Conservative MPs, who talked about some of the real issues in that country. We heard complaints from Scottish National party Members but, as my colleagues pointed out, it is within the Scottish Government’s power to solve many of the issues that they raised. The Scottish Government have already delivered the money delivered through the Barnett formula to sort out those problems.

My hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) talked about the failings in the NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) talked about those failings as well, and asked where the SNP Members were during the debate. No doubt they were getting seats for the England versus Colombia match that we are all looking forward to. My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) talked about the failures of IT to deliver agriculture payments to Scottish farmers and the lamentable results in English and maths education, which show that Scottish children have been let down by the Scottish Government.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) talked about how hard-working people are being punished by the raising of taxes on their income at the same time as the Scottish Government are inflating the cost of government and the number of Ministers. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) talked about the poor management of the budget in Scotland. I am glad that we were able to finalise the details of the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal.

*Stephen Kerr:*** Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to confirm to the House that the UK Government contribution to the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal is £45.1 million? The SNP asked the question, and I think it is worth repeating that it is £45.1 million—thanks in no small measure to my right hon. Friend.

*Elizabeth Truss:*** I can indeed confirm that the money allocated by the UK Government to the Stirling and Clackmannanshire deal is £45.1 million. I thank my hon. Friend for his hard work on that deal. I will be looking at the issues across Government to make sure that we deliver these deals in the best possible way to deliver real value for local communities. That is what MPs have been campaigning for and I will look into that very carefully.

*Pete Wishart:*** Will the Chief Secretary tell us when the Tay cities deal is finally going to be agreed and concluded? Will she confirm that the UK Government will match the funds that the Scottish Government supply to that deal?

*Elizabeth Truss:*** I have already had some discussions about the Tay cities deal with the Secretary of State for Scotland, and we will look at the details. We constantly have to make sure that every piece of Government spending has the best possible value for money. It was significant that in the speeches from SNP Members we heard nothing about value for money or the fact that taxpayers pay for spending.

*Peter Dowd:*** Will the Chief Secretary join me in congratulating the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on actually getting an answer out of this Government?

*Elizabeth Truss:*** My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling is an extremely effective Member of Parliament from whom Members from all parties could learn.

*Luke Graham:*** I have two questions. First, SNP Members regularly question this, so will my right hon. Friend confirm Scottish Conservative Members’ involvement in the Stirling Clackmannanshire deal and Tay cities deal negotiations? Secondly, will my right hon. Friend push the devolved Administration in Scotland to confirm that the money that they have pledged for the Tay cities deal will be new money, not reallocated money, as has been the case with so many other deals, which have taken money from other local authorities?

*Elizabeth Truss:*** It was very good to meet my hon. Friend to discuss the Clackmannanshire and Stirling city region deal and I look forward to visiting him and his colleagues soon in Scotland to see how things are working on the ground. I can confirm that we will be working further with the Scottish Government on those issues.

I commend the work that is being done on the oil and gas industry by my colleagues in Scotland. That issue was also raised by the hon. Members for Aberdeen North and for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady). As well as visiting Stirling and Clackmannshire, I will be going up to Aberdeen to hear directly from representatives from the oil and gas industry. **Interruption.** Well, that...
is a very kind comment, sir, and may I offer the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) a happy birthday on this great occasion?

A number of Members raised the issue of health funding. As has been explained by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, we will be presenting the details of how that will be funded in due course and, of course, the Barnett consequentials will be passed to the devolved Administration. It is very important that we ensure that, for every pound of money that we spend, we get maximum value for money. With that money going into the health service, we are making sure that it is improving productivity, improving efficiency and getting the maximum benefit from our hardworking staff on the frontline. That will, of course, be part of the work that we do as well.

On Brexit, we heard the usual contradictions from Scottish National party Members. First, they said that if we were to leave the customs union, which is what we, as a Government, have promised to do, that would be bad news for Scotland. We are, of course, seeking the most frictionless arrangements at the border that we possibly can. They also said that they wanted an independent Scotland, cut off from the rest of the UK. Given that goods worth £46 billion travel from Scotland into the rest of the UK every year, that sounds to me like a highly contradictory statement.

We also heard various comments about Northern Ireland and the additional £1 billion allocated to it. I point out to all Members of the House that, of course, we have the Barnett formula, which is about making sure that consequentials are passed through when there is a change in spending in England, but it is absolutely standard practice that we do fund outside the Barnett formula where it is valid, and we have done so in the past. For example, the Stormont House and Fresh Start agreements were funded outside the Barnett formula. We altered the Barnett formula, as was mentioned by the hon. Member for Carmarthen East and Dinefwr (Jonathan Edwards), to make sure that spending levels in Wales are fair, and we have also allocated extra money to city deals across Wales and Scotland, because they have, in many cases, largely devolved purposes.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Aberdeen North welcomed the funding that we are providing for the potential visit of the American President to Scotland. I confirmed today that we will supply an extra £5 million to cover the cost incurred by Police Scotland. Again, that is outside the Barnett formula. Therefore, we do have the Barnett formula there for the important work that is done across Government, but it is right that we should look at the specific circumstances that we face with respect to Northern Ireland and to getting the right city deals in Scotland and Wales. We need to ensure that we use our funding in that flexible way.

We have heard some fantastic speeches in the House today, but I observe that the champions of fiscal rectitude and enterprise in Scotland sit on the Conservative Benches.

6.58 pm

Kirsty Blackman: I appreciate the chance to have a minute at the end of this debate. On the debate and the way it has been conducted, I appreciate the fact that so many people have taken an interest in the finances that are being granted to the devolved institutions. I really hope that, when it comes to the Budget process later this year, we see the same level of interest.

Finally, the change in the process is welcome to ensure that we can actually debate the estimates, but I suggest that further change is still needed to ensure that the estimates debates can be meaningfully amended and that proper alternatives can be put forward so that we can make it clear what our alternative spending plans would be and that we can have actual meaningful votes on them.

Question deferred (Standing Order No. 54).

7 pm

The Deputy Speaker put the deferred Questions (Standing Order No. 54).

MAIN ESTIMATES 2018-19

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

Question put.

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Ministry of Justice:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £3,673,299,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017-19,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £198,182,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £3,635,304,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 312, Noes 32.

Division No. 198)
Treasury Spending: Grants to Devolved Institutions

Date: 3 July 2018

Masterton, Paul
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sherry
Murison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O’Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Par
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, rh Claire
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, rh Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Purseglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, rh Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sumak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Syms, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Williers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Kelly Tolhurst and
Mims Davies

NOES

Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Cowan, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Edwards, Jonathan
Gethins, Stephen
Question accordingly agreed to.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE AND MINISTRY OF HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Question put,

That, —

(1) for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Department of Health and Social Care:

(a) further resources, not exceeding £61,592,567,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,

(b) further resources, not exceeding £3,634,818,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(c) a further sum, not exceeding £62,184,741,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament; and

(2) for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government:

(a) further resources, not exceeding £17,571,313,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,

(b) further resources, not exceeding £4,003,853,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(c) a further sum, not exceeding £12,311,628,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Does the hon. Gentleman’s point of order relate to the Division?

Sir Bernard Jenkin: It does.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may make his point of order.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Madam Deputy Speaker, do you suppose that the Scottish National party would be calling so many Divisions this evening if it was Scotland that was playing an important football match?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman’s point of order relates to the Division, but it is not of course a point of order. I just have a fervent hope that, one day, Scotland will be playing an important football match.

Once again, I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 307, Noes 33.

Division No. 199 [7.18 pm]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldivis, Harriet
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Braverman, Suella
Breer, Jack
Brigden, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Cliborn-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davis, rh Mr David
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
 Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.

Talkers for the Noes:

David Linden and
Neil Gray

Tellers for the Noes:

Whitford, Dr Philippa
Wishart, Pete
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Wishart, Pete

The House proceeded to a Division.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: Madam Deputy Speaker, do you suppose that the Scottish National party would be calling so many Divisions this evening if it was Scotland that was playing an important football match?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman’s point of order relates to the Division, but it is not of course a point of order. I just have a fervent hope that, one day, Scotland will be playing an important football match.

Once again, I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.
Treasury Spending: Grants to Devolved Institutions

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Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Sir Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercer, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O’Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Patel, rh Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Perry, rh Claire
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poultner, Dr Dan
Pow, as Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Roberts, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Scully, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shebolute, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Soames, rh Sir Nicholas
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Stride, rh Mel
Sturdy, Julian
Sukau, Rishi
Swain, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Sym, Sir Robert

Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Whittaker, Craig
Whittingdale, rh Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Williamson, rh Gavin
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Kelly Tolhurst and
Mims Davies

NOES

Hendry, Drew
Hobhouse, Wera
Hosie, Stewart
Lake, Ben
Law, Chris
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stuart C.
Monaghan, Carol
Newlands, Gavin
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wisheart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
David Linden and
Neil Gray

Question accordingly agreed to.

DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION

Question put,

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by the Department for Education:

(1) further resources, not exceeding £34,065,501,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,

(2) further resources, not exceeding £14,429,588,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

(3) a further sum, not exceeding £46,841,694,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.

The House divided: Ayes 297, Noes 33.

Division No. 200 [7.33 pm]

AYES

Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew

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Cameron, Dr Lisa
Chapman, Douglas
Cherry, Joanna
Cowen, Ronnie
Crawley, Angela
Docherty-Hughes, Martin
Edwards, Jonathan
Fellows, Marion
Gethins, Stephen
Gibson, Patricia
Grant, Peter
Hendry, Drew
Hobhouse, Wera
Hosie, Stewart
Lake, Ben

Law, Chris
Linden, David
Mc Nally, John
McDonald, Stuart C.
Monaghan, Carol
Newlands, Gavin
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sheppard, Tommy
Stephens, Chris
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Hywel
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Noes:
Patrick Grady and Neil Gray

**Question accordingly agreed to.**

**Treasury**

**Question put.**

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019, for expenditure by HM Treasury:

(1) the resources authorised for use for current purposes be reduced by £294,563,000, as set out in HC 957 of Session 2017–19,

(2) the resources authorised for use for capital purposes be reduced by £6,293,934,000 as so set out, and

(3) the sum granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament be reduced by £4,632,925,000.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I think the Ayes have it. [Interruption] I think the Ayes have it. [HON. MEMBERS: “No!”] Order. I have tried to discern from the voices whether the Ayes or the Noes have more votes, but I am unable to do so owing to the extreme number of voices involved. I therefore have no option but to call a Division.

**The House divided:** Ayes 239, Noes 33.

**Division No. 201**

[7.45 pm]

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel
Ainley, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Karen
Braverman, Suella
Breer, Jack
Brine, Steve
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert

Burghart, Alex
Bums, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Clunch, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, Glyn
Davies, rh Mr David

Dinenage, Caroline
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Donries, Ms Nadine
Dowden, Oliver
Doyelle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Eustice, George
Evenett, rh Sir David
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Ford, Vicky
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazier, Lucy
Freyer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gaile, Sir Roger
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Graham, Luke
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Hafal, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hobhouse, Wera
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Hudson, rh Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jerick, Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth

Jones, Mr Marcus
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lawson, rh Mark
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Leigh, Sir Edward
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Brandon
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Little Pengelly, Emma
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Mak, Alan
Mathew, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
Maynard, Paul
McLaughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Merriman, Huw
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Milling, Amanda
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Paisley, Ian
Parish, Neil
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Perry, rh Claire
Philp, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, rh Mark
Pritchard, Mark
Pursglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Roberts, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Gavin
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
## Treasury Spending: Grants to Devolved Institutions

**3 JULY 2018**

### MAIN ESTIMATES 2018-19

**Question put,**

That, for the year ending with 31 March 2019:

1. Further resources, not exceeding £174,176,998,000 be authorised for use for current purposes as set out in HC 957, HC 945, HC 959, HC 964, HC 968 and HC 977; of Session 2017–19;

2. Further resources, not exceeding £21,891,869,000 be authorised for use for capital purposes as so set out, and

3. A further sum, not exceeding £155,875,820,000 be granted to Her Majesty to be issued by the Treasury out of the Consolidated Fund and applied for expenditure on the use of resources authorised by Parliament.—(Craig Whittaker.)

**The House divided: Ayes 175, Noes 33.**

### Division No. 202 [7.56 pm]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AYES</th>
<th>NOES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adams, Nigel</td>
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<td>Wollaston, Dr Sarah</td>
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<td>Wood, Mike</td>
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<td>Swire, rh Sir Hugo</td>
<td>Wragg, Mr William</td>
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<td>Wright, rh Jeremy</td>
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<td>Throup, Maggie</td>
<td>NOES</td>
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<td>Tomlinson, Justin</td>
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**Question accordingly agreed to.**

*The Deputy Speaker then put the Question on the outstanding Estimate (Standing Order No. 55).*
Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Voting this evening was the only opportunity we have had to speak out against the continued austerity of this Conservative Government and the attack on the budget of Scotland. More importantly, three weeks ago, we witnessed a situation—[Interuption.] I hear about embarrassment, but don’t talk to me about embarrassment. The embarrassment that took place was three weeks ago, when we had a power grab against the powers of the Scottish Parliament. I signalled to the Conservative Government then that what they had done was act against the consent of the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish people, and that it would no longer be business as usual. I now commend the Scottish National party for standing up for Scotland tonight, and I say to this Conservative Government that we will use parliamentary procedure to oppose this Government every inch of the way and to make sure that the SNP stands up for the rights of the Scottish Parliament until Westminster recognises that it must reverse the power grab against the Scottish Parliament. [Interuption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have heard the right hon. Gentleman’s point of order, but I have to say that although it was most eloquent, it was not necessary. It seems to me that the point he is making is that he and his colleagues will use parliamentary procedure to make sure their opinions and those of their constituents are well aired here in this Parliament. He has done so and he has every right to do so, and the Chair will defend his right and that of his colleagues to do so. However, there was no need for his point of order, because we are all in agreement about the importance of using parliamentary procedure for the correct ends.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Further to what the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) said, it is interesting to know how important he thought the debate was, given that he could not sit through it. Only two Scottish National party Members sat through the debate, which the SNP called. Will you respond to a couple of points, Madam Deputy Speaker? First, I do not care how many times we vote but we saw pathetic theatrics from the SNP and you twice had to instruct the Serjeant at Arms to get them out of the Lobby. Only 33 SNP Members voted tonight. I know that under the SNP in Scotland the level of physical activity is among the lowest levels anywhere in the world, but I am surprised at how long it took just 33 Members to walk through the Lobby. That affects not only Members of this House but House staff. Will you or the Speaker reflect on how such antics affect House staff, who have to stay here for longer?

Secondly, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber spoke about austerity from this Conservative Government. He and his colleagues have just voted against the estimates, and had they succeeded, Scotland would have received nothing from the UK Parliament. Is it correct that they want no money to go to Scotland?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman’s final point is a point of debate, and we have had a full debate on those points today. As to his point about the length of time it took to divide the House five times this evening, nothing disorderly has occurred—
Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP) rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman must allow me to finish answering the point of order. Nothing disorderly has occurred. It is up to every Member of this House to decide how to use parliamentary procedure. I am quite sure that those who called five Divisions this evening know the effect that their calling of those Divisions has had.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The House spent more than an hour this evening voting on huge matters of public expenditure and committing serious amounts of public money for spending. Given that we had five votes and it took more than an hour, have you been given advance notice of a statement from the Leader of the House on the introduction of electronic voting?

Madam Deputy Speaker: No. The hon. Gentleman asked a reasonable question, to which I can only give a straight answer.

Pete Wishart: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I very much concur with my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden). We spent an hour considering the important allocation of spending by Department by this Government, and we here in this place are tasked with that very function. However, would it not be a lot better to solve all these situations by doing what my hon. Friend suggests and getting electronic voting down here so that we do not spend hours and hours in packed Lobbies going around in circles just to vote?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman’s point, but I have already answered it. I have had no notice of such a matter to be raised.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Given the faux outrage from one of the Opposition parties and the effect that that can have on personal health, can you advise whether the Clerks or the House authorities have checked both the location and the workability of defibrillators near to the Chamber?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman’s point, and I have every confidence that the defibrillators—I do wish that the hon. Gentleman had not asked me to say that difficult word at this time. I am confident that the important machines to which the hon. Gentleman refers are in perfect working order.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order 118(6)),

That the Rt Hon The Lord Lilley, David Mowat and Ian Blackford be discharged as Trustees of the House of Commons Members’ Fund and Eric Martlew, Peter Grant, Charles Walker and Anne Main be appointed as Trustees in pursuance of Part 1, Section 2 of the House of Commons Members’ Fund Act 2016.

—(Andrea Leadsom.)

Business without Debate

VOYEURISM (OFFENCES) (NO. 2) BILL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Orders Nos. 59(3) and 90(5)), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Ordered,

That the public bill committee to which the Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill stands committed shall:

(1) have the power to send for persons, papers and records, and
(2) have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 7 to 11 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

That the draft Digital Government (Disclosure of Information) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 17 May, be approved.

DISCLOSURE OF INFORMATION

That the draft Data Sharing Code of Practice: Code of Practice for civil registration officials disclosing information under section 19AA of the Registration Service Act 1953, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.

REGISTRATION SERVICE

That the draft Research Code of Practice and Draft Accreditation Criteria, which were laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.

DIGITAL ECONOMY

That the draft Statistics Statement of Principles and Draft Code of Practice on changes to data systems, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.

STATISTICS AND REGISTRATION

That the draft Information Sharing Code of Practice: Code of Practice for public authorities disclosing information under Chapter 1, 3 and 4 (Public Service Delivery, Debt and Fraud) of Part 5 of the Digital Economy Act 2017, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.

DIGITAL ECONOMY

That the draft Statistics Statement of Principles and Draft Code of Practice on changes to data systems, which was laid before this House on 21 May, be approved.

HOUSE OF COMMONS MEMBERS’ FUND

Resolved,
PETITION

Changing Places Toilets

8.15 pm

John McNally (Falkirk) (SNP): I rise to present this petition on behalf of the residents of the Falkirk constituency.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Falkirk constituency,

 Declares that the petitioners believe that over a quarter of a million people with profound and multiple learning disabilities, as well as other disabilities that severely limit mobility, cannot use standard accessible toilets and need personal assistance to use the toilet or change continence pads; further that their needs can only be met by Changing Places toilets with adequate space and equipment, such as hoists; further that the need for these facilities is growing with the number of people with complex disabilities and increased life expectancy; further that “British Standard 8300:2009 Design” of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people recommends that Changing Places toilets should be provided in larger public buildings and complexes; and further that the current lack of Changing Places toilets is leading to thousands of disabled people experiencing a risk of injury and lack of dignity as families are forced to risk their own health and safety by changing their loved one on a toilet floor.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to proactively promote the installation of Changing Places toilets in all large public places, including Government buildings; and further to amend existing equality legislation to specifically require that Changing Places toilets should be provided in addition to standard accessible toilets in venues such as city centres, shopping centres, arts venues, hospitals, transport hubs like train stations, airports and motorway service stations, leisure complexes, sporting stadiums and arenas, in order to enable all disabled people to go out, go to the shops, attend hospital appointments, enjoy community life and travel with the same dignity as everyone else.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Chris Heaton-Harris.)

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I put the question I should explain for the sake of clarity that the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) who was due to bring the Adjournment debate this evening is unable to do so. There will therefore be no Adjournment debate.

Question put and agreed to.

8.18 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Wednesday 4 July 2018

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[MRSpeaker in the Chair]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

East Africa: Trading Opportunities

1. Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): What steps her Department is taking to promote trading opportunities to encourage development in east Africa.

Penny Mordaunt: The UK supports regional trade and development by improving infrastructure and cutting red tape through our flagship programme TradeMark East Africa, which has helped to reduce import times at the Mombasa port by 50%. We will also support the region by ensuring that there is continuity in market access arrangements post-EU exit.

Andrew Jones: In the past decade more than 1 billion people have been lifted out of poverty, largely thanks to free trade. Owing to my commercial experience, I have seen for myself the quality of the produce from the agricultural sector in east Africa, and I am not surprised that it has found a strong export market. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best and most sustainable way out of poverty is through trade?

Penny Mordaunt: I agree wholeheartedly. The greatest progress that has been made towards the first global goal has resulted from the liberalisation of world trade. We want to move more nations from aid to trade, because that is where their future lies.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State may know that the countries of east Africa are some of the worst performers in terms of road deaths and serious road accidents. Could part of the trading relationship involve trade in both services and technology to help to bring down those dreadful casualty figures?

Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and thank him for the work he does on a critical issue that results in an enormous number of deaths every year. I think there will be a greater onus on us to provide technical support for developing countries, and cutting the number of road deaths is clearly an area in which that technical support will be needed.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Key to boosting east African trade is continuing to break down non-tariff barriers between East African countries, reduce transportation costs and reduce import-export clearance times. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the TradeMark East Africa programme has an important continuing role in helping to boost trade even further?

Penny Mordaunt: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. Frictionless trade is a good thing, and the corridor that TradeMark East Africa has provided has cut border times dramatically, as well as cutting corruption. We are funding the second leg of that trade corridor, and it has done amazing work for the region’s prosperity.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): If we are to promote trade, we need to be able to promote travel. However, the Scotland Malawi Partnership and others have received a litany of complaints from people who want to come to the United Kingdom and sell their goods from east Africa, but have been denied visas by the Home Office. Will the Secretary of State meet representatives of the Home Office as a matter of urgency to ensure that they sort out the mess of the east African visa system?

Penny Mordaunt: I have frequent dialogues with colleagues throughout the Government. As the hon. Gentleman will know, 70 of my staff are embedded in the Department for International Trade to deal with these issues, particularly in respect of developing nations, but if he knows of any specific cases and will pass them on to me, I shall be happy to look at them.

Kate Osamor ( Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): In Lisbon 11 years ago, the historic joint Africa-EU strategy was launched. That strategy, which was based on the principles of ownership, partnership and solidarity, has already had to withstand the economic impact of the global financial crisis and the eurozone crisis. What assessment has the Secretary of State made of the social and economic impact that Brexit will have on it?

Penny Mordaunt: The fact that we will be able to make our own trade arrangements with developing countries will be of massive advantage to those countries, and the nations with which we work are incredibly excited about the possibilities that will result from our leaving the EU. I think that we should be optimistic about Africa’s future, and its leaders are optimistic, but as well as promoting trade we must help them to combat illicit money flows. If we add up everything that goes into those nations, we see that it is tiny by comparison with what leaves them as a result of corruption and illicit flows. We will deal with both.

Kate Osamor: I am grateful for the Secretary of State’s answer, but I have to say that I do not share her optimism. Along with many others, I believe that the joint Africa-EU strategy marked a new phase in Africa-EU relations, opening a gateway to future trade deals based on benefits for African communities, not just European corporations. How will the Secretary of State ensure that any future deals negotiated by her Government benefit rather than damage the livelihoods of the world’s poorest people?
Penny Mordaunt: Because at the heart of our trade strategy as we leave the EU are developing nations—we want to give them preferential treatment and support them in their ambitions. I would point to the evidence that since we announced that we are leaving the EU, we have made huge progress on initiatives like the Sahel alliance and a greater focus with bilateral partners including France on our work together in Africa. I urge the hon. Lady to be optimistic about the future.

**Technology**

2. Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote the development of technology in developing countries.

6. Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): What steps she is taking to promote the development of technology in developing countries.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): Investments from our aid budget in technologies are saving and changing lives all over the world. Half our research budget this year is for new technologies in developing countries in health, agriculture, climate, clean energy, water and education and for humanitarian response in emergencies.

Vicky Ford: The Phoenix rotary club in Chelmsford supports the One Last Push campaign to eradicate polio, and new technology means that polio workers on the ground can target efforts where they are most needed. Will my hon. Friend confirm that this Government will continue to support the One Last Push campaign and end polio for good?

Harriett Baldwin: This question gives me an opportunity to pay tribute not only to the rotary club my hon. Friend mentions but to Rotarians across the world who have been working hard on this push to eradicate polio. UK Aid has been at their side throughout this journey; we have eradicated something like 99% of the world’s polio cases, but we must continue to push for that final 1%.

Alan Mak: In April, Commonwealth Heads of Government committed to achieving quality eye care for all. Will my hon. Friend meet me and other vision campaigners to ensure that vision is taken seriously at this month’s global disability summit?

Harriett Baldwin: I thank my hon. Friend for highlighting such an important issue. As someone who is extremely myopic, I benefit from glasses. This is an incredibly important aspect of what we can do, and at this month’s disability summit the world will be coming together to pledge what more it can do to help with people’s inclusion around the world, and certainly vision will play a key role.

Catherine McKinnell (Newcastle upon Tyne North) (Lab): Last week, I met some of CAFOD’s Pacific climate warriors who campaign for environmental justice so that they can protect their homes so that we can all work together to protect our common home. What are the British Government doing to promote the development of technology in places that suffer the most catastrophic effects of climate change that ultimately affect the UK, too?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Lady is right to highlight this issue. She will be aware of the announcements we made alongside so many of the small island states at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in April to help them with technology to adapt to the changing climate, and also the additional £61 million announced by the Prime Minister to tackle the scourge of plastics in our oceans.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Some small charities are working exceptionally hard in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly using technology to deliver much needed clean drinking water to those areas. What help can the Government offer to those charities to deliver for those people in that exceptionally dry part of the continent of Africa?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw attention to the challenges posed by climate change, particularly to the countries nearest the Sahara. UK Aid is working very closely with them, and investments in technology are helping to address that and provide drinking water for many hundreds of thousands of people in sub-Saharan Africa.

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): The development of the M-Pesa payment system in Kenya with the help of DFID has absolutely transformed the economy, particularly for small traders. What other steps and similar developments can my hon. Friend outline that would improve the Kenyan economy?

Harriett Baldwin: This is another great example of how UK Aid can work to unlock a payment system that in many ways leapfrogs what we have here in the UK: people can pay from their mobile phone for a range of technologies and goods. Recently we had a solar fridge in DFID, and M-KOPA Solar is helping poor people in Kenya and other countries to pay for those fridges by using that technology.

Chris Law (Dundee West) (SNP): After continued pressure from these Scottish National party Benches, it was reassuring to hear after meeting the World Bank last week that it has made a firm commitment to no longer finance upstream oil and gas after 2019. However, the UK Government are still spending millions of pounds of taxpayers’ money funding fossil fuel projects in countries that are already bearing the worst brunt of climate change. Will the Minister of State today match the World Bank commitment to stop funding polluting fuels by 2019?

Harriett Baldwin: Along with colleagues in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, we are doing a lot to encourage many of these countries not only to power past coal and fossil fuels but to invest considerable amounts in renewable energy. I share the hon. Gentleman’s aspiration to work with developing countries to power past fossil fuels.

Several hon. Members rose—
Mr Speaker: Aht! I thought the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden) wanted to come in on this question, but he has perambulated to Question 5. Well, so be it. That is not a scandal.

Venezuela: Vulnerable People

3. Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): What assistance her Department is providing to vulnerable people in Venezuela. [906241]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): We are deeply concerned by the worsening crisis in Venezuela. Too many Venezuelans are suffering the consequences of the Maduro Government’s mismanagement. While we are urging the Venezuelan Government to accept humanitarian aid, we are deploying two humanitarian advisers to the region in support of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office’s efforts to push the Government of Venezuela to meet the needs of their population.

Andrew Rosindell: The Minister will be aware of the United Nations human rights report that details the complete erosion of the rule of law and human rights in Venezuela. Will he explain to the House what the UK is doing to support economic reform and stability in the region, to ensure that the money is spent in the right place while the Venezuelan Government still refuse to acknowledge that there is a humanitarian crisis?

Alistair Burt: We are providing support in the crisis and to the region through the funding of key UN and humanitarian agencies, but, as my hon. Friend says, this is limited because of the Venezuelan Government’s refusal to admit the seriousness and reality of the situation. We are urging them to address the most urgent needs of their own population.

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): Very large numbers of people are fleeing the situation in Venezuela, particularly into neighbouring Colombia. Will the Minister tell us what the Government are doing to address that situation, and what opportunity the Government see for the proposed UN global compact for refugees to address crises such as this one?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight the regional crisis and the growing global problem of refugees in relation to the length of time they stay in host states and their prospects of returning. Venezuela is not the only affected area. We continue to support UN agencies in relation to this, and we are playing a leading part in creating the new compact for refugees.

Orphanages

4. Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What steps her Department is taking to support children in orphanages in developing countries. [906242]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt): DFID’s primary focus is to tackle the underlying drivers of institutionalisation. We address these through poverty reduction programmes and through our strong focus on education, nutrition, health, economic development and social protection. Through UK Aid Match, we are funding charities such as Hope and Homes for Children, which supports children into family-based and community-based care.

Dr Cameron: We all recall the harrowing reports of disabled children being tied to rough bed frames or left on sodden mattresses on the floor and abandoned in orphanages around the developing world. Given that the ability to thrive entails the right to grow up in a family, what priority is the Department giving to finding foster families for disabled children in orphanages?

Penny Mordaunt: The hon. Lady touches on a subject close to my heart. When I was an aid worker in the former eastern bloc, I worked in the hospitals and orphanages there. Many of the children were not orphans as we would understand the term; they had families. We believe that the best way to care for and develop children, whatever their circumstances and whether they have a disability or not, is in a family or community setting. The disability summit that is coming up will afford us the opportunity to focus on the needs of the specific group that the hon. Lady refers to.

Mr Gary Streeter (South West Devon) (Con): I am sure the Secretary of State shares my horror at recent reports about the sex trafficking and exploitation of children in unmonitored orphanages. Is this not something that the international community should look to stamp out, and will she do her utmost to move it up the global political agenda for action?

Penny Mordaunt: We will certainly do that. DFID does not, as a policy, fund these types of institutions. We have traction with other donors around the world, and we will certainly try to move them on to share our policy.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is estimated that more than 50,000 children have been orphaned in Yemen since 2015, but the orphanages are struggling with a chronic lack of funds and are in constant danger of being closed. What discussions is the Minister having with her Saudi counterparts and others to ensure that the orphanages are getting the support they need?

Penny Mordaunt: This is a complex area, and I thank the hon. Lady for raising it. In addition to the efforts we are making with the Saudis and the Emiratis to try to get supplies into Yemen, we are also aware of in-country issues with moving supplies around, including basic vaccines and so forth. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Middle East is in frequent contact with all parties, as am I.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The Indian diaspora in this country is incredibly generous in donating money to fund orphanages and schools for disabled children in India. What assistance can the Department give to match fund that generosity?

Penny Mordaunt: Our aid programmes in India are limited to investments on which we make a return and to technical support. We do not do traditional aid programmes in India, and we certainly do not fund the types of institutions to which my hon. Friend refers.
If he thinks we should be doing something that we are not, he can write to me and I will take a look at it, but that is our policy.

Access to Education

5. Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What steps she is taking to expand access to education in developing countries.

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): We supported 7.1 million children between 2015 and 2017 through bilateral and multilateral education programmes. UK leadership has secured ambitious commitments to ensure that children have access to 12 years of quality education.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Minister for her response. DFID is working with the Pakistan Minorties Teachers Association to provide education to religious minorities in schools. Does the Minister agree that DFID should continue and expand its work with the PMTA to ensure that hate material is removed from textbooks and that it does not inadvertently fund discriminatory materials?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue, and I can reassure him that DFID does not fund the production of any textbooks in Pakistan that contain any bias against religious minorities. I can also confirm that in terms of our support for education in Pakistan, we support independent evaluations—

Mr Speaker: That is extremely helpful, but I am keen to get others in.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Given that most jobs in developing countries will be in self-employment or small businesses, what input does DFID have into the curriculum in developing countries to ensure that the necessary skills are taught?

Harriett Baldwin: The education strategy that we published earlier this year focuses on ensuring that people leave primary school with good literacy and maths skills and that we invest in high-quality teaching.

Jo Platt (Leigh) (Lab/Co-op): Last month, I had the pleasure of visiting a Voluntary Service Overseas project in Malawi that focuses on the promotion of youth engagement in the country. My time was spent with young people from all over the country who were passionate, political and eager to have their voices heard. Will the Minister commit to meet me to discuss that project and how we can support youth voice structures in developing countries?

Harriett Baldwin: I am delighted to hear about the hon. Lady’s wonderful trip to Malawi and look forward to meeting her to discuss it in more detail. I can confirm that we are doing extensive bilateral work in Malawi and that many young people from the UK go out with the VSO’s International Citizen Service.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Some 11.5 million young people globally have signed a petition to the United Nations backing a $10 billion plan to create an international finance facility for education that would guarantee every child the right to an education by 2030. If we are to meet the sustainable development goal on education, former Prime Minister Gordon Brown says that we require an “extraordinary, indeed superhuman, effort.” Will the Government provide both financial guarantees to such a facility and that superhuman effort?

Harriett Baldwin: I pay tribute to former Prime Minister Gordon Brown’s work on the girls’ education agenda around the world. We are considering the feasibility of that international financing facility for education, and we are going through the technical detail, but we are not yet in a position to support the proposal.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I will take Questions 7 and 9, but there will be no time for supplementary.

Rohingya Refugees in Bangladesh

7. Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): What steps she is taking to support Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Alistair Burt): The UK has helped to lead the international response to the crisis. We are working with the Government of Bangladesh and humanitarian partners to improve shelters, provide water and sanitation, vaccinate against deadly disease and pre-position emergency supplies.

Ross Thomson: Save the Children reports that just over 70% of school-age Rohingya children in Bangladesh are currently out of school. Will the Department help to lead a significant scale-up of education programming in the refugee camps?

Alistair Burt: Yes.

Dr Blackman-Woods: Save the Children has warned that not only are powerful storms affecting the Rohingya refugee camps, but such storms are likely to become more frequent. What are the Government doing to ensure that global action is taken to address flooding issues?

Mr Speaker: I understand the sense of anticipation. I just remind the House that we are discussing the plight of Rohingya refugees, whom we owe some empathy and respect.

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Asia and the Pacific was at Cox’s Bazar last weekend. He raised issues of global support with the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, who was also there. We are working with global partners to do all we can to meet the needs of those in such difficult circumstances.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): The Red Cross has announced that conditions are not ready for Rohingya refugees to return to Myanmar. This will be a protracted
crisis, with up to 200,000 Rohingya being affected by the monsoon season. This was not a surprise. Where was the Government’s disaster relief plan?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady is right, and we are already working with other agencies on the fact that the refugees are likely to be there for much longer than people would originally have expected. It is still important that they are safe to return to Myanmar, but if that is not possible, we will indeed be working with others to make sure they are as safe as possible where they are.

Topical Questions

T1. [006254] Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Penny Mordaunt) [in British Sign Language]: On 24 July, we will hold a global disability conference here in London, organised by the UK Government, by the Kenyan Government and by the International Disability Alliance. For too long, in the world’s poorest countries, disabled people have not been able to reach their full potential because of stigma or not enough practical support. I am proud to be focused on this area, which has been neglected for too long. The conference will support the global effort to advance disability inclusion for some countries’ most vulnerable people.

Mr Speaker: In thanking the Secretary of State, and the gratitude of the House is obvious, let me just say by way of reply that that is—in British Sign Language—good news.

Bob Stewart: As a boy, my ayah came from Somaliland, which was a British protectorate then. Will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explain what her Department is doing to help that great country, which has always been a friend of the UK?

Penny Mordaunt: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. UK assistance to Somaliland includes support for critical economic infrastructure, humanitarian assistance, police and justice support, and engagement in counter-terrorism and security. We provided rapid response in the aftermath of the tropical storm, and we will also support Somaliland’s National Electoral Commission to plan and prepare to deliver elections next year.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP) rose—

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Lady will revel in her popularity.

T2. [006255] Alison Thewliss: Reuters has reported that fighting in Hodeidah has forced around 2,000 high school students to take a dangerous six-hour journey across mountains to sit their exams in Sana’a, but more than 2 million children are reported to be out of school in Yemen, and the conflict is having a profound effect on their education. What are the Government doing to end the conflict?

Alistair Burt: We are giving every support to the work of the UN special envoy, Martin Griffiths, who, almost as we speak, is in Sana’a and talking to the coalition parties. Only through this UN negotiation might we get a resolution of the conflict.

T3. [006256] Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I know through personal experience the good work DFID does with the Foreign Office in promoting trade with developing countries. Will the Secretary of State continue to work with the Foreign Office to make sure we offer better trade deals to developing countries, particularly those in Africa, than they currently have with the European Union?

Penny Mordaunt: As I said, leaving the EU affords us the opportunity to develop our own trading deals with those nations. We work incredibly closely with the Foreign Office, including through our ministerial teams coming together once a week to discuss these matters.

T4. [006257] Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The recent aid transparency index showed DFID a commendable third but the FCO a poor 40th in the global rankings of aid agencies. Can the Secretary of State explain the discrepancy between the two and ensure that all UK aid spend meets the same standards of quality, poverty reduction and transparency?

Penny Mordaunt: As the hon. Gentleman knows, earlier this year I convened the first cross-ministerial official development assistance group. Every Department that spends ODA money, and the National Security Council, which looks after the cross-Government funds, meets at that group, through which we will provide training, support and the tools DFID uses to get other Departments to the standard we want them to reach.

T5. [006258] Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): Building on the Government’s efforts to tackle modern slavery in the UK, will the Secretary of State update the House on what steps she is taking to tackle modern slavery overseas?

Alistair Burt: Tackling modern slavery is a priority for the Department. Last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced £40 million of new funding that aims to reach at least 500,000 people at risk of slavery. We will continue to work on this as a priority.

T6. [006259] Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): Ministers will be aware that as we speak the bulldozers are moving into the Palestinian settlement of Khan al-Ahmar. That will lead to the forced displacement of the residents there, in a clear breach of international law. Will the Minister assure me that we are on the ground now, gathering evidence of these breaches of law, so that those who are responsible will later be legally accountable?

Alistair Burt: I will be answering an urgent question on this matter shortly. We have taken a great deal of interest over many years in the affairs of those Bedouins at Khan al-Ahmar. I visited them just a few weeks ago, and this remains a matter of great concern to the UK.

T7. [006260] John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): At the recent royal highland show, a number of excellent charities were exhibiting, including the Scottish-based landmine clearance charities the HALO Trust and World Vision. Will the Minister reassure the charities and me that this Government will continue to be committed to the 0.7% international aid budget and the support they give to these charities?
Penny Mordaunt: Absolutely; that is our policy. I will be visiting the HALO Trust tomorrow. It does a tremendous amount of work de-mining in many parts of the world, and it is a very valued partner of ours.

T8. [906261] Carol Monaghan (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Healthcare workers tending wounded in Gaza are coming under fire from the Israeli defence force. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Israeli Government about this unacceptable and barbaric practice?

Alistair Burt: We have many discussions with the Government and state of Israel about the issues recently in Gaza. Although it is right for Israel to protect itself, aid workers and medical workers should never be a target for attack.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906224] Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 4 July.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure the whole House will wish to join me in offering our heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of Private Reece Miller from the 1st Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment, who died on 30 June while on operations in Estonia as a result of a non-battle injury. Private Miller served his country with great distinction and that service will not be forgotten.

This week marks 70 years since the NHS was founded. It is rightly one of the nation’s most loved institutions, and I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to and recognise the dedication and hard work of NHS staff across the country.

The country witnessed a very rare and welcome event last night: the England football team winning a penalty shoot-out. The explosion of relief and, most of all, joy could be felt up and down the country, not just in the Smoking Room of the House of Commons. I congratulate Gareth Southgate and his team on a great performance. Last week, I promised to fly the flag of St George above No. 10 for all of England’s remaining matches in the World cup, and I know the whole House will want to join me in wishing the England team the best of luck in Saturday’s quarter final. Let’s keep that flag flying.

This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Tommy Sheppard: The Scotland Act 2016 transferred responsibility for the Crown Estate in Scotland to the Scottish Government, but a large retail park in my constituency called Fort Kinnaird was exempted from the transfer on the grounds that it was tied up with a private joint venture. Last month, the Government sold the Crown Estate’s interests in Fort Kinnaird for the receipt of £167 million, but last week the Treasury confirmed to me that none of that money would go to the Scottish Government and that it would be retained here in London. Will the Prime Minister review that decision in order that the proceeds from the sale of a major public asset in Scotland’s capital city are given to the people of Scotland?

The Prime Minister: My understanding is that although the hon. Gentleman says that the money has come to the Government, it has actually gone to the Crown Estate, but I am happy to look into that and clarify that point for him in writing.

Q3. [906226] Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): After last night, I am sure that there is one question I do not need to ask the Prime Minister, which is whether she believes that football is coming home. I will ask her, though, whether she agrees that another great victory for our United Kingdom is the BAE contract. What does she think that means for jobs up and down the country in the manufacturing supply chain after we leave the EU?

The Prime Minister: I sincerely hope that Members across the whole House will congratulate England on their success and welcome it.

My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight the excellent news that Australia has selected the global combat ship and BAE as the preferred tenderer for its future frigate programme. The scale and nature of the contract puts the UK at the forefront of maritime design and engineering, and demonstrates what can be achieved by UK industry and Government working hand in hand. It is the start of a new era in strategic defence industrial collaboration between the UK and Australia, which will be reinforced by the forthcoming defence industrial dialogue. As we leave the UK—as we leave the EU—[Interruption.] As we leave the European Union, the UK has an opportunity to build on our closer relationships with allies such as Australia, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I share the Prime Minister’s tribute to Private Reece Miller, who died while serving in the 1st Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment. Our thoughts are with this family and friends and, of course, with the entire regiment.

I spent the weekend congratulating the NHS on its 70th birthday in Nye Bevan’s birthplace. The message from the crowd there was: “The NHS is great; let’s fund it properly.” [Interruption.] While we are speaking of emergency services, we should send from the House a message of our thanks and support to all those firefighters tackling the huge fires on Saddleworth Moor and Winter Hill.

Of course, I congratulate the England team on a fantastic performance last night and wish them well on Saturday in the match against Sweden.

With fares rising above inflation, passenger numbers falling and services being cut, does the Prime Minister accept her failure on yet another public service: the buses?

The Prime Minister: First, I absolutely agree with the right hon. Gentleman and, I am sure, all Members of this House that our thanks should go to the firefighters and troops who have been struggling to deal with the terrible fires that we have seen on the moorlands in the north of Britain. On his point about buses, I merely
point out to him that we should look at the responsibility that local authorities up and down the country have for the buses.

May I also comment on the right hon. Gentleman’s remark about putting sufficient funding into the national health service? At the last election, the Labour party said that giving the NHS an extra 2.2% a year would make it “the envy of the world.”

Well, we are not giving it an extra 2.2% or, indeed, an extra 2.5% or 3%. We are giving the NHS an extra 3.4% a year. Now the right hon. Gentleman tries to say that that is not enough. What should we believe—what he said before the election or what he says after the election?

Jeremy Corbyn: In case the Prime Minister has forgotten, my question was about buses. Since 2010, her Government have cut 46% from bus budgets in England and passenger numbers have fallen, and, among the elderly and disabled, they have fallen by 10%.

Her Government belatedly committed to keeping the free bus pass, but a bus pass is not much use if there is not a bus. Does she think it is fair that bus fares have risen by 13% more than inflation since 2010?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that, in his first question, he asked about buses; he did indeed and I gave him an answer in reference to buses. What he cannot do is simply stand up and make assertions about what the Government are doing without expecting those to be challenged, which is exactly what I did on his funding for the national health service.

It was right that we made that commitment in relation to bus passes. What we are seeing across the country is that, as people’s working habits are changing, there is less usage of buses, but we are working with local authorities on this. Local authorities have many responsibilities in relation to buses, and I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman asks some of those local authorities what they are doing about the buses in their own areas.

Jeremy Corbyn: Under this Government, fares have risen three times faster than people’s pay. Bus users are often people on lower incomes whose wages are lower than they were 10 years ago in real terms and who have suffered a benefits freeze. Under the stewardship of this Government, 500 bus routes have been cut every year, leaving many people more isolated and lonely and damaging our local communities. Does the Prime Minister believe that bus services are a public responsibility, or just something that we leave to the market?

The Prime Minister: I have made the point on two occasions about the responsibilities that others have in relation to buses. The right hon. Gentleman might, for example, look at what the Mayor of London—who when I last looked was a Labour politician—is doing in relation to buses in London. The right hon. Gentleman talks also about the impact of fares on lower-income people. It is important that we consider the situation of people who are on low incomes. That is why it is this Government who introduced the national living wage and who then increased the national living wage. That is why it is this Government who have taken 4 million people out of paying income tax altogether. That is helping people on low incomes in this country.

Jeremy Corbyn: When Sadiq Khan ran for Mayor of London, he promised to freeze bus fares, and what has he done? He has frozen bus fares. [Interruption.] If the Prime Minister is concerned about the travelcard fares, she should speak to the Secretary of State for Transport: he is the one who sets that fare. Bus routes are being wiped out: 26 million fewer journeys have been made across the north of England and the midlands under her Government. So much for a northern powerhouse and a midlands engine. Can we be clear: does the Prime Minister think that deregulation of the bus industry, putting profit before passengers, has been a success or a failure?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman talks about what the Mayor of London has done, but what have we seen in the number of people using buses in London? It has gone down under the current Mayor. If he wants to talk about what Mayors are doing, I am very happy to talk about what Andy Street, the Conservative Mayor of the West Midlands, has done; he has extended free bus fares to apprentices and students.

Jeremy Corbyn: It will be a Labour Government who save the bus industry and who give free fares to under-26-year-olds. The truth is that since deregulation fares have risen faster than inflation, ridership has fallen and these private bus monopolies have made a profit of £3.3 billion since 2010. That is what the Tories give us in public transport. The Government have given metro Mayors the powers to franchise and regulate to secure better services. Why will they not extend that power to all local authorities?

The Prime Minister: Of course, the local authorities have some responsibilities and capabilities in relation to subsidising bus routes and fares; and, yes, we have given those powers to the metro Mayors. The right hon. Gentleman earlier referenced what was happening in the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine. I will tell him what is happening: more investment in our public transport; more investment in our roads; and more investment in the infrastructure that brings jobs to people in the north and across the midlands.

Jeremy Corbyn: It is a shame that this Government are so shy of giving powers to local authorities, and are instead more interested in cutting their resources. Bus services are in crisis under this Government. Fares are increasing, routes are being cut and passenger numbers are falling. The situation is isolating elderly and disabled people, damaging communities and high streets, and leading to more congestion in our towns and cities, with people spending more time travelling to work or school. It is bad for our climate change commitments and for our air quality. Will the Prime Minister at last recognise the crucial importance of often the only mode of transport available for many people by ending the cuts to bus budgets and giving councils the power to ensure that everyone gets a regulated bus service, wherever they live?

The Prime Minister: I will take no lessons from the right hon. Gentleman in devolution to local authorities. Which party has established the metro Mayors and given them those powers? It is the Conservative party in government. Which party is doing growth deals around the country, giving local authorities new responsibilities? It is this Conservative Government. And what did we
see in the north-east? When we were talking to Labour councils in the north-east about a devolution deal, Labour council leaders there rejected that devolution. That is what the Labour party is doing. The right hon. Gentleman wants to know what this Government are delivering for the people of the north, the south, the midlands—for every part of this country. We are delivering record high employment, rising wages, falling borrowing, stronger environmental protection and a Britain fit for the future.

Q4. [906227] Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): You wait for a bus question and seven come along at once; there is another one coming now. This morning, my office manager walked from Delabole to Sir James Smith’s School. This is a route that Cornwall Council has deemed to be safe and within Government guidance, and parents have been refused free public transport for their kids. At three miles there and three miles back, the road has no pavements and no street lighting. In winter months, the children will be asked to walk to and from school in the dark on a single track road alongside cars, tractors and lorries. There are similar stories all around Cornwall. Will the Prime Minister look at this guidance and talk to Cornwall Council about what can be done?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to recognising the responsibilities that local authorities have in these matters, and we have committed to providing them with the funding that they need. We have increased the funding to Cornwall for 2019-20 by more than £12 million since 2015-16. It is a matter for the local authority to decide how to spend its funding and to make decisions on local matters, but I agree with my hon. Friend and would encourage local authorities to ensure that, in doing that, they are absolutely taking into account the wishes and concerns of the communities that they serve, including the one to which my hon. Friend referred.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): As a football fan, may I congratulate England on their very fine victory in the World cup—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. It is very unfair on the leader of the Scottish National party—[Interruption.] Order. I inform the House, almost certainly for the first time, that we are today visited by an American state senator and his wife, whom I had the great privilege of meeting earlier this morning. I am sure we will wish to impress the two of them with the quality of our behaviour.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Perhaps on American Independence Day we should welcome the senator.

May I congratulate England on their very fine victory in the World cup and wish them all the best in their coming games?

This morning, we have learned that Vote Leave is a trail of involvement in illegal activity and foreign money. The Electoral Commission has said in relation to the Vote Leave matter that it will consider representations it has received and will “publish a thorough and detailed closing report in order to provide a full and balanced account”. The Government will of course consider that report when we receive it, and we will also consider any recommendations arising from it when it is released.

Ian Blackford: Of course, it is the principle that is important. Our democracy cannot and must not be bought. The Conservatives are systematically shielding their donations from public scrutiny. Jackson Carlaw—the MSP for Eastwood—the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) have all accepted donations from the Scottish Unionist Association Trust. The trust has donated £319,000 to the Scottish Conservatives, yet there is no information available about the people who currently manage the trust and there are no public accounts to indicate who its donors are or what assets it holds. The BBC has revealed that the former vice-chairman of the Conservative party in Scotland, Richard Cook, was behind the DUP’s £435,000 donation during the EU referendum, and has “a trail of involvement in illegal activity and foreign money”. I am now giving the Prime Minister—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I very much hope and trust that the right hon. Gentleman has advised those Members in advance, as he has referred to them. I know that he is approaching his peroration and will be sensitive to the fact that the House wants that.

Ian Blackford: I have indeed, Mr Speaker.

I am now giving the Prime Minister the chance to tell us what checks the Scottish Tory party had in place before accepting such large donations. Will she investigate the links between the Conservative party and the trust and promise to publish a list of all donations and donors?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that all donations to the Scottish Conservative party are accepted and declared in accordance with the law, and the Scottish Conservative party works with the Electoral Commission to make sure that that is all done properly.

Q5. [906228] Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): Domestic abuse is an act of brutality often hidden in plain sight, and it affects one in four women and one in six men across this country. Last week saw the launch of the Employers’ Initiative on Domestic Abuse, and 170 companies and some MPs have signed up to train their employees to spot the tell-tale signs and to help provide much-needed support. Will the Prime Minister support this initiative and also encourage more MPs and businesses across the country to sign up?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised a very important issue. Of course, as she said, this is something of which we see many women being victims, but men can be victims of domestic abuse, too. I certainly welcome...
the efforts of the Employers’ Initiative in raising awareness of this issue and in doing that vital work of providing advice and support to employers and employees on the steps they can take to address it. I understand that the Minister for Women, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), who is also responsible for crime, safeguarding and vulnerability, recently launched the launch of a toolkit for employers on tackling domestic abuse that was developed in partnership with the Employers’ Initiative, Public Health England and Business in the Community. I would absolutely encourage Members from all sides of this House, as employers, to sign up to the initiative and also to promote it in their constituencies so that we can take every step we can to root out domestic violence and domestic abuse.

Q2. [906225] Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): President Trump has recently locked up children in cages, instigated a ban on Muslims, stalled action on climate change and started trade wars, and he is now threatening women’s reproductive rights. Should the Prime Minister not be challenging his divisive and damaging policies, instead of inviting him for tea and cakes at No. 10?

The Prime Minister: I have responded to the points that the hon. Lady has raised. I have been very clear, and I have said in the House, for example, that the action taken against child migrants was not unacceptable and is not something we would do here in the UK. We did not consider that acceptable. She wants me to challenge the President of the United States. What better way to challenge the President of the United States than to sit down and talk to him?

Q6. [906229] Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I look forward to welcoming Heather Steven, the practice manager at Loftus’s GP surgery, to my right hon. Friend’s Downing Street reception for the NHS later. Can my right hon. Friend assure me that the investment that the hon. Lady has mentioned. On the general point, I think it is agree with them that we must remove all barriers to campaign to stop that is backed by 1,800 local residents that, Nottingham College is planning to close it. Our willingness to work hard, not where they have come from and not what their circumstances are. I want to see a country where how far their circumstances and, as I say, whatever their particular education, higher education—is available to people and whatever their background, whatever their circumstances and, as I say, whatever their particular circumstances. I want to see a country where how far people go in life is about them, their talents and their willingness to work hard, not where they have come from and not what their circumstances are.

Q7. [906230] Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): This morning, the head of the National Audit Office took the unprecedented step of writing an open letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, setting out how the right hon. Lady has misled Parliament in three respective statements she has made on universal credit. The ministerial code is very clear that: “It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity. Ministers who knowingly mislead Parliament will be expected to offer their resignation to the Prime Minister”.

Has she?
for the University of Northampton. It is good to see that investment being put in by the university—into its staff, technology, facilities and infrastructure—but putting students firmly at the heart of the institution. As he says, however, it is also a great opportunity for the local community. As my hon. Friend will know, the campus is part of the Northampton Waterside enterprise zone, which, I understand, has created over 2,800 jobs and attracted £320 million of private sector investment, and I am sure this new campus will also be a catalyst for investment, and new jobs as well.

Q10. [906233] Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): Maintained nursery schools employ qualified teachers, are inspected as schools and have all the costs associated with schools, but still they are not funded as schools. Does the Prime Minister recognise that all the grammar schools in the world cannot raise standards if children are neglected in those early years? If these nursery schools are not funded as schools, they will close. Will the Prime Minister commit today to making sure that that does not happen and make a financial commitment to support them in the future?

The Prime Minister: I fully recognise the importance of the early years education that is provided by nursery schools—maintained nursery schools—and, indeed, by others. That was why many years ago, when I was the chairman of education in the London Borough of Merton, I was happy to complete a programme that ensured we put in early years education for those parents who wanted it, at a time when the Labour Government and others—the Labour Government previously and the Government at the time—were not putting it in. We recognise the importance of nursery education.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Despite great Government investment in the railway line from Cambridge into King’s Cross St Pancras and then across London on Thameslink, over the past seven weeks my constituents have endured an appalling service. We are told that that will now improve on 15 July, but if it does not, does the Prime Minister agree with me that Govia Thameslink should be stripped of the service and a new operator—a new operator of last resort—brought in to sort out this mess?

The Prime Minister: As I have said previously, the disruption that passengers have been facing is simply unacceptable, and it is unacceptable that it is continuing to happen today. As my right hon. and learned Friend says, on 15 July there will be a full interim timetable introduced, with the aim of improving reliability and performance for passengers, and there is work being done—a review of Govia Thameslink, which is going to report in the next few weeks. Clearly, however, we need to ensure that the priority is to make sure that that interim timetable is implemented and passengers do get the services that they need. We also need to ensure that if the services are not provided in the way that is right and are not what the passengers need, the Department for Transport will look at this and that nothing is off the table.

Q11. [906234] Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): Mr Speaker, I invite you and the Prime Minister to visit Newcastle this summer for the Great Exhibition of the North, celebrating engineering and creativity from Stephenson’s Rocket to the Wilson twins’ Suspended Island installation. Given that the Prime Minister refuses to invest in tidal power or carbon capture and to rule out a no-deal Brexit, which will devastate engineering supply chains, what hope is there that our engineering future will be as glorious as our engineering past?

The Prime Minister: There is every hope, because of the investment and the commitment that the Government are giving through our modern industrial strategy. The hon. Lady asks if I and members of the Government will visit the Great Exhibition of the North, and I think she may be surprised to find how many of us do indeed visit it over the summer.

Mr Speaker: I am sure people will. I visited the constituency of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) in February, and I am still fizzing with excitement about the matter five months later.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Popular Bramhall hairdressers Ed and Mike are visiting Parliament today. Like many other small businesses, it is because of their skills, expertise and hard work that they are successful. Will the Prime Minister join me in praising small businesses up and down the country for the work that they do, and does she agree that is by building a strong economy that we provide the best conditions for them to survive and thrive?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in recognising the vital role that small businesses play in our economy and, indeed, in our local communities. They provide valuable services, products and jobs for local people, and we should never fail to recognise the great work that they do. Government’s role is to ensure that there is a strong economy in which those businesses can thrive, and that is exactly what the Conservative Government are doing.

Q12. [906235] Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Prime Minister will know that later this month Zimbabwe will have its first election since Mugabe was ousted by a military coup. The hon. Member for Bournemouth West (Conor Burns) and I have recently returned from Zimbabwe, and we heard from Zimbabweans concerns that the constitution is not being adhered to, and the main opposition do not have a chance to reach the state media. Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that our Government will not rush to agree that this is a free and fair election?

The Prime Minister: I commend the excellent work that the hon. Lady continues to do as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on Zimbabwe. We obviously welcome the announcement of the date of the election on 30 July, but we urge all parties involved to pursue free, fair and peaceful elections, because that is absolutely what the Zimbabwean people deserve. We will certainly watch very carefully to see how those elections are conducted, and consider the conduct of those elections as appropriate. We have repeatedly said that if the Zimbabwean Government can demonstrate commitment
to political and economic reform, the UK stands ready to do all that it can to support recovery, but that commitment is essential.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): President Macron has ordered that every one of his Cabinet Ministers should be subject to a performance review. When the Prime Minister meets her Cabinet on Friday, will she judge every one of their contributions and the final deal that they decide against the very clear criteria laid down in the Conservative manifesto and the Labour manifesto, which got 85% of the votes, that we will categorically leave the single market, the customs union and the remit of the European Court of Justice?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to tell my right hon. Friend that we have a strong team in Cabinet who will take this decision on Friday. I assure him that the Brexit that the Government will deliver and are working to deliver is a Brexit that ensures that we are out of the customs union, we are out of the single market, we are out of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, we are out of the common agricultural policy, we are out of the common fisheries policy, we bring an end to free movement, we take control of our borders, and we have an independent trade policy, but we are also able to have a good trade arrangement with the European Union, protecting jobs and prosperity for the future.

Q13. [906236] Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): Sweetly following on from the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson), with the Prime Minister’s Chequers failure Friday on the way, and “max-fac” soon giving way to “tot cap” or total capitulation, the UK’s Government handling of Brexit has been dither, delay and duck, but can I give the Prime Minister an opportunity for a straight answer? Shellfish producers in my constituency are worried about getting their produce to French and Spanish markets, so together with those countries and independent Ireland, how open does the Prime Minister want and envisage borders and trade routes after Brexit?

The Prime Minister: I have made it very clear that we are committed to no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and to as frictionless a border with the European Union in future as possible. Can I also say that I think fishermen up and down the country welcome the proposals that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has introduced on fisheries policy for the future? It is this Government who are taking the UK out of the common fisheries policy. The worst policy for fishermen in Scotland would be the Scottish National party’s policy of staying in the CFP.

Mr Speaker: Order. I know what this question is about and it must be heard with courtesy and respect.

Robert Halfon: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): In Harlow in 2016—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Just as an aside, Mr Speaker, the Bercow report on speech, language and communication was very well referenced in Westminster Hall this morning.

My question is about ice cream. In this hot weather, there has been a great run on Granny Gothards ice cream in Taunton Deane, for which all the milk is provided by local farmers. The ice cream is not just popular locally, however, because Granny Gothards has just secured contracts to sell its 135 varieties of ice
The Prime Minister: I am happy to join my hon. Friend in congratulating Granny Gothards on not only its two business awards but, crucially, the export contracts it is working on. It is absolutely right that my hon. Friend highlights the opportunities that businesses will have as we leave the European Union. It will be an opportunity to boost productivity, deliver better infrastructure and maximise the potential of our country and businesses such as Granny Gothards, which is obviously such a success in her constituency.

Mr Speaker: In the week of a special birthday for him, and in the name of encouraging a young Member as he seeks to build his career, I call Mr Stephen Pound.

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): May I, in respect of the Prime Minister’s opening statement, declare an interest, as I, too, was born in the first week of July 1948? While I recognise that the national health service is held in rather higher esteem by the nation than I am—[HON. MEMBERS: “No!”]—we both need a bit of care and attention. May I tell the Prime Minister that what the NHS needs is not warm words but cold cash? I would willingly—happily, joyfully—pay more in income tax to save the national health service. Would she?

The Prime Minister: May I first wish the hon. Gentleman a very happy 70th birthday this week? He is held in very high esteem across this House and he should not underestimate that—[INTERJECTION] My saying that might not have done very well for him with his Front Benchers, but there we are. May I also take this opportunity, as I have not had one previously, to wish a very happy birthday to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound), whose birthday was on Monday?

On the issue that the hon. Member for Ealing North raised in his question, we are providing the national health service with that money to ensure that, by 2023-24, it will have £20 billion extra in real terms. We are ensuring, alongside that, that a 10-year plan is produced that delivers for patients.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Following the celebrations of Armed Forces Day, will my right hon. Friend join me in expressing support for the work of the On Course Foundation, which is doing excellent work, as she says. It is really important that we ensure that those of our armed forces who are injured and who are veterans are given the support that they need. She has highlighted a particular area in which that is happening. Armed Forces Day on Saturday gave me the opportunity to announce that, next year, we are going to have the first national games for wounded, injured and sick veterans and personnel of our armed forces. That has been inspired by the Invictus games, but these games will focus on those in our British armed forces. As she mentioned the police and fire services, I will ensure that the relevant Home Office Minister will meet her.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): This morning, I spoke to Afghan Sikh community leaders in my constituency following the horrific terrorist attack in the Afghan city of Jalalabad on Sunday, which was a deliberate attack with devastating consequences. The 19 people killed included the trustees of the gurdwara and the only Sikh candidate in the forthcoming elections, Mr Avtar Singh Khalsa. The gurdwara had been a safe haven for many persecuted families and they were on their way to visit the President. At the moment, the Afghan Sikhs in west London are meeting in prayer and remembrance for those killed, many of whom they knew. Will the Prime Minister update the House on what she is doing to ensure the safety of minorities in Afghanistan, and will she meet the Afghan diaspora to discuss their concerns?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady raises a very serious issue. The terrorist attack that she refers to was indeed appalling. As she said, too many victims lost their lives as a result of that attack that took place in Afghanistan. It is important that we ensure that we are providing support, as we do through our contribution in Afghanistan. That is a contribution to security in the Kabul area specifically from our forces, but it is also about working with others to ensure that the Afghan security forces are able to provide security and safety for all communities living in Afghanistan. Tremendous achievements have been made in Afghanistan today, compared with the situation before these efforts, but, particularly, as the hon. Lady highlights, too many terrorist attacks are still taking place in Afghanistan. We will continue to work with our allies and the Afghan Government to prevent these in future and to ensure that people can go about their daily lives in safety and security and with confidence.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): In agreeing with the Prime Minister, as I always do, that Brexit means Brexit, and that that generally means taking back control, may I ask her to confirm not only that after we leave the EU we will be leaving the single market and customs union, but that it is her personal position, and the settled negotiating position of Her Majesty’s Government, that we will have full and unfettered control of migration into this country, full and unfettered control in our ability to make new trade deals with the rest of the world and, above all, full and unfettered control of how we regulate our own business?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to say to my hon. Friend that after we leave the EU, we will indeed be operating our own independent trade policy. Parliament will be determining our laws and we will bring an end to free movement.
Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): A 19-year-old constituent was stabbed in December 2016. He nearly died from his injuries and his mother subsequently came to see me to get help to move out of the borough because she feared it would happen again. Despite our efforts, they were not moved. Late last Wednesday, as his mother feared, he was again stabbed—this time seven times—close to their home. Prime Minister, it is an outrage that the system is not protecting teenagers in this situation. What does it say about our society? Will she commit to introducing a compulsory scheme—not just pan-London but nationally—to facilitate such necessary moves between social housing providers and quite simply save lives?

The Prime Minister: On the attacks on the hon. Gentleman's constituent, we are taking the use of offensive weapons—we have introduced the Offensive Weapons Bill—and serious violence very seriously. I understand that he sits on the serious violence taskforce that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has established to take account of views across the House on an issue that is a matter for all of us, and I am grateful to him for sitting on that taskforce.

The hon. Gentleman refers to a matter that lies in the hands of local authorities and social housing providers. On operations across London, he could of course speak to the Mayor of London about his responsibilities and the measures that he could introduce.
Points of Order

12.52 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. We will come to the right hon. Lady later—I will not forget her—but first I call the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to make a point of order.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. While speaking in Parliament in answer to questions on the National Audit Office report on universal credit, I mistakenly said that the NAO had asked for the roll-out of universal credit to continue at a faster rate and to be speeded up. In fact, the NAO did not say that, and I want to apologise—

Hon. Members: Resign!

Mr Speaker: Order. This is rather unseemly. I know that passions run high, but the Secretary of State contacted me to say that she intended to say what she is about to say, and the House should hear her say it.

Ms McVey: I want to apologise to you, Mr Speaker, and the House for inadvertently misleading you. I meant to say that the NAO had said that there was no practical alternative to continuing with universal credit. We adopt a “test and learn” approach to the roll-out of universal credit, which the NAO says mainly follows good practice, and therefore the point I was trying to make was that the calls from the Labour party to pause it seemed to fly in the face of those conclusions. As you know, Mr Speaker, I asked you yesterday if I could come to the House to correct the record. I believe it is right that, as a Minister, I should come and correct the record, and I therefore hope that you will accept my apology.

On the other issues raised in the letter sent today by the NAO, the NAO contacted my office at the end of last week and we are working on setting up a meeting. On the NAO report not taking into account the impact of the recent changes to UC, I still maintain that this is the case, and those changes include the housing benefit run-on, the 100% advances and the removal of waiting days. The impact of those changes is still being felt and therefore, by definition, could not have been fully taken into account by the NAO report. I hope that that clarifies the position.

Mr Speaker: I can confirm that the Secretary of State most certainly did contact me last night indicating that she would like to apologise on a point of order, and I certainly accept her apology.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I gently say to the right hon. Gentleman that the apology has been proffered and, as far as the Chair is concerned, accepted. I do not want there to be an extended—

Frank Field: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have given notice to you, for tomorrow’s agenda, to ask for an urgent question to follow up that statement.

Mr Speaker: It is very generous of the right hon. Gentleman to tell me publicly that he has given me notice. I do not know whether he means that he has given me notice just now, in the form of that point of order, or that he has made an application to my office. People do not normally advertise urgent questions to the nation in advance. I will make a decision about it at the appropriate time.

Frank Field: You are an innovator, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Flattery will get the right hon. Gentleman everywhere. My innovations are there for everyone to see, whether they approve of them or not, but as far as urgent questions are concerned, as I think the House accepts, I make a judgment at the appropriate time, and now is not the appropriate time. He has, with some cheekiness and a degree of perspicacity, made his own point in his own way, and it is on the record.

Caroline Flint: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Prime Minister’s questions, the Prime Minister suggested that when she was chair of education at Merton Council, she put money into early years education while Labour was making cuts. She was chair of the education board from 1988 to 1990, when the council was Conservative-run and, as far as I recall, there was a Conservative Government. Can you advise me, Mr Speaker, on how we can correct the record?

Mr Speaker: I think that the right hon. Lady has, to her own satisfaction, done so already. I hope she will understand if I say that I will not get into a debate about the respective local government records of senior officeholders in the House. Apart from anything else, I am not sure that I would want to stand by everything that I said or did in the 1980s.
Demolition of Khan al-Ahmar

12.58 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab) (Urgent Question): I had hoped to ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on the imminent demolition of the village of Khan al-Ahmar and the threat of the forcible transfer of its residents, but in the light of developments this morning, I must instead ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement on the demolition that has commenced at Khan al-Ahmar and the village of Abu Nuwar and on the actual forcible transfer of the residents of those villages.

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): This morning, officials from our embassy in Tel Aviv and from our consulate general in Jerusalem visited Khan al-Ahmar to express our concern and demonstrate the international community's support for that community. Once there, they did indeed observe a bulldozer, which began levelling the ground. While we have not yet witnessed any demolition of structures, it would appear that demolition is imminent. We deeply regret this turn of events. The United Nations has said that this would not only constitute forcible transfer, but pave the way for settlement building in E1. In accordance with our long-standing policy, we therefore condemn such a move, which would strike a major blow to prospects for a two-state solution with Jerusalem as a shared capital.

The United Kingdom has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Israeli authorities and others, for instance during my visit to Khan al-Ahmar on 30 May. On 12 June, I issued a video message emphasising the United Kingdom's concern at the village's imminent demolition, and I reiterated that concern to the Israeli ambassador to the UK on 20 June. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has also expressed his concern, most recently during his meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu in London on 6 June. The Foreign Secretary's statement on 1 June also made it clear that the UK was deeply concerned by the proposed demolition, which the UN has said could amount to "forcible transfer", in violation of international humanitarian law. As recently as Monday, the British ambassador to Israel raised the issue with the Israeli national security adviser. Later today, the British ambassador will join a démarche alongside European partners to request as a matter of urgency that the Israeli authorities halt demolition plans.

Isreal believes that, under its independent court system and rule of law, it has the right to take the action that it is beginning today, but it is not compelled to do so, and need not do so. A change of plan would be welcomed around the world and would assist the prospects of a two-state solution and an end to this long-standing issue.

Richard Burden: As we speak, bulldozers are flattening the village of Khan al-Ahmar and destroying its school, which was built with international donor support and which provides education for about 170 Bedouin children from five different communities. The village of Abu Nuwar is also being destroyed today.

People who live in these villages threaten no one. Their crime is to have homes on land that Israel wants, in order to expand the illegal settlements of Kfar Adumim and Ma'ale Adumim. To speak plainly, this is state-sponsored theft: a theft that will cut the west bank in two, making a contiguous Palestinian state near-impossible and the prospects of a two-state solution still more remote. More importantly, as the Minister said, the forcible transfer of the villagers of Khan al-Ahmar and Abu Nuwar contravenes international humanitarian law. It is a war crime.

As the Minister also said, he—along with over 100 Members of this House and peers, and about 300 international public figures—has repeatedly urged the Government of Israel not to go ahead with the demolitions. Now that they have ignored those calls, the question is whether the commission of this war crime will have any consequence. If not, why will Mr Netanyahu believe other than that war crimes can continue with impunity? What practical action do the UK Government propose to take to hold those responsible for this war crime to account, and is it not time finally to outlaw commercial dealings by UK firms with illegal settlements in the west bank?

Alistair Burt: As the hon. Gentleman set out, this is an area of land that many of us know quite well from visits made over a lengthy period. This is a community that was moved before and moved to settle where they are, unable to get planning permission under Israeli planning law and therefore they built the settlement they did. The discussion that has taken place since the formation of the settlement has been about the rights and wrongs of that building and about the difficulties of Israeli law as to what would happen next. However, I think that the overwhelming sense of many of us is that this should not be happening and need not be happening. The damage it proposes to do, at a time when many of us are looking to a move on the middle east peace process in which this piece of land might play a significant part, rather pulls the rug away from those of us who want to see a two-state solution—which, as many say, is perhaps why this has been done.

As I have said, both the timing and the action itself are deeply concerning, but nothing is irrevocable yet. In terms of what we are doing, we are already in conversation with like-minded European partners about what should be done next.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): I believe in a secure Israel alongside a viable and independent Palestine. However, it is beyond comprehension that a remarkable country like Israel, cultured, sophisticated and democratic—whose people down the centuries have themselves known such terrible suffering—can countenance such wicked behaviour, which is contrary to all international laws and humanitarian conventions, as she continues to bulldoze Palestinian villages like Khan al-Ahmar, whose residents' houses are, I understand, at this moment being flattened. What other country would dare to behave in this barbaric way? Will the Government condemn these actions in the strongest possible terms?

Alistair Burt: The short answer to the last part of my right hon. Friend's question is yes. The wider issue that he raised—and he put this extremely well in the Westminster Hall debate last week—is the contrast between an Israel for which many of us feel very deeply, and which we believe has many admirable qualities, and some of its actions which seem to go against that history and culture, and about which we have a sense of deep
[Alistair Burt]

concern and sometimes bemusement. I know that it will have its reasons to defend its actions, and it is for the Israeli Government to do that, but the rest of us are disappointed and very perplexed today.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you for granting the urgent question, Mr Speaker, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), who chairs the Britain-Palestine all-party parliamentary group, on securing it.

Just a week ago, when the Minister spoke about Khan al-Ahmar—it is a village that both of us have visited, and I know that he has worked on this issue assiduously—he agreed that, if the village were demolished, if its 181 residents were forcibly removed, and if their homes and their school were razed to the ground to make way for new illegal Israeli settlements, that action would “call into question the viability of a two-state solution.” It could, he said, be construed as “a breach of international humanitarian law”.

However, he also said: “It is still possible for any demolition not to go ahead.”—[Official Report, 26 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 744.]

A week on, I am afraid that—as we all know—we are no longer dealing in woulds, coulds and possibilities. We are dealing with the reality: the reality that this forcible eviction and demolition, this breach of international law, this hammer blow to the two-state solution, is taking place as we sit here today.

We are all tired of asking what can be done to cajole or compel the Netanyahu Government to start listening to their international allies, to start complying with UN resolutions on settlements, or to start acting with some basic fairness and justice on the issue of building permits. That is all increasingly just a waste of breath. I therefore wish to ask the Minister two different questions today, which I believe are more worth while.

Does the Minister share my concerns that we are fast approaching a dangerous place where even some respected Palestinian figures are moving away from the idea of a two-state solution towards seeking democratic control over a single state, with all the implications that that would have for the potential Israeli minority? If the Minister shares those concerns, will he also agree with me that before that shift in opinion can take hold, and before the actions of the Netanyahu Government render a two-state solution a geographical impossibility, this is the time for the United Kingdom to lead the major nations of the world in recognising the Palestinian state, and to do so immediately, while there is still a state left to recognise?

Alistair Burt: I thank the right hon. Lady for what she has said. I agree with many of her remarks. The danger that she identifies of a two-state solution slipping away has, of course, been potentially real for some time. Individual actions such as this are doubly difficult to understand and accept at a time when we have all been anticipating a development that would be workable and allow us to move forward.

No one quite knows what the boundaries of a future state might be, but we all have a sense of what the parameters would be. That is why the concerns about the E1 area outside Jerusalem have been so important and have perhaps led to some restraint over the years.

But if that is to go, what is left and what is next? So that is what we need to do. As I said this House: today we are currently in conversation with like-minded European partners about what the response should be and there are a number of options, but the best thing we should be thinking through is what option preserves the important chances there still are for a two-state solution, which has been so long sought for and is still in the mind of the UK the only viable possibility of providing both justice for the Palestinians in some measure and security for the state of Israel. If there is a different answer, I, in 30 years, have not heard it.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Many of us on both sides of this House who call ourselves friends of Israel rightly hail that nation as a bastion of liberal values in a troubled region, so does my right hon. Friend agree that it is right that we ask the Israeli Government to abide by the very highest standards that they set for themselves, and will he underline again the point he has just made: the real solution to all this: yet again, is to keep pushing for the peace process to be resurrected and following that path forward?

Alistair Burt: My right hon. Friend has been, and is, a good friend of the state of Israel, as many of us have been over many years, and I can sense the pain behind his question. We do indeed rightly hold a democracy to high standards and will continue to do so.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): This is devastating news today at a human level for those who have been impacted, but also for the peace process.

Does the Minister agree that sustainable and lasting peace is built on respect for one another and respect for the rule of law? Does he agree with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that the demolition violates international law? If so, will he set out what kind of action he is thinking about taking, rather than merely expressions of regret? Is it time for a global response?

Finally, may I join others in this House, the Scottish Government and other states in calling on this Government to recognise Palestine as an independent state?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments and the way in which he put them. At such a fragile time, it is difficult to see what steps can be taken next, after what will be seen as a provocative gesture, that would make it still viable to keep working on the solution we want to see, but that still remains a possibility. There was much talk when Jerusalem was recognised by the United States as the capital of Israel that that was the end of everything. It was not and it remains entirely possible to proceed. Jerusalem should be a shared capital—that is what the United Kingdom believes—and despite the Americans’ position we do not believe that has been taken off the table. But every time there is a move that makes that solution less likely, it becomes more difficult to see what the alternative is. As I have said, there will be a range of options and we are considering with friends and others what might be done.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): My right hon. Friend is precisely that: he is an honourable man and a reasonable man, and I have some sympathy for him that...
each and every time he comes to the Dispatch Box to talk about this issue he provides that reasonableness, but he does provide a commentary at a time when we are looking for leadership and I would just ask him this. At the moment, the latest news is that the Americans are discussing the Kushner peace process with the Russians. Has my right hon. Friend or any of his officials or fellow Ministers in the FCO had any input or sight of the Kushner peace plan, or are the British not playing any part in this whatsoever?

**Alistair Burt:** The American envoys have been in regular contact both with officials and the Foreign Secretary and on occasions with myself. They have kept many of the proposals very close to their chest. We have said that it is very important that they should continue to engage with the Palestinian Authority and we would again seek that, although everyone can understand why those circumstances are difficult. We have urged that the US envoys might certainly talk more widely to partners when they get close to producing their response to this. I am sure, as I have said before, that the US being the only broker in this is unlikely to be accepted now. We are very keen to work with others when these proposals come forward to find an answer.

**Hilary Benn** (Leeds Central) (Lab): It is, sadly, all too clear that, as well as destroying people’s homes, as we have heard today, the Government of Israel are in the process of severely damaging their international reputation when it comes to respect for the rule of law. Given all the criticism that the right hon. Gentleman has made from the Dispatch Box and other countries have echoed, why does he think the Government of Israel feel they can get away with doing what they want?

**Alistair Burt:** I do not know whether it is appropriate to answer in the terms that the right hon. Gentleman has offered. He poses his own question, which I think will be out there for many others to consider. We remain clearly very attached to Israel as an ally in many respects in terms of defence and security particularly in what is a difficult region, but, as is sometimes the case even with the closest friends, there are areas where we are not only not certain of their course of action but believe it to be fundamentally wrong, and this is one of those. So we must manage that relationship. This provides another opportunity for us to talk further about what will happen in the future, but every time there is something like this, it makes it that bit more difficult to see that something we have all been working on for so long is going to result in the solution we are all seeking. But we will continue to press for that.

**Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): Are we mad in continuing to express concern or even condemn and yet expect a different outcome? No, we are not mad because actually we do not expect a different outcome and, by our refusal to act, we make ourselves complicit, don’t we?

**Alistair Burt:** My right hon. Friend has experience of government and of relationships with those in the region and understands the background of which he speaks. It does make it all difficult, but we have not all given up on the prospects of a two-state solution, which, as I have said, I do not see an alternative to, and the UK’s determination to keep in contact with all sides in relation to this and press that case is perhaps even more imperative now than it was this morning.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): Like the Minister, I visited the village a few weeks ago and saw for myself the school that the community had built there, which is currently, as we speak, being destroyed along with the community’s homes. Today, I am also, like the Minister, perplexed and dismayed that Israel appears not to comprehend or to be prepared to take note of the outrage and the damage done to its reputation by this forcible transfer of communities, which is regarded as a breach of international law. Can he assure us that, as well as the talks he mentioned with like-minded European partners, he will ensure that the Government make the case to the President of the United States when he is here this month that this cannot be allowed to continue and make clear the damage it is doing, because he does appear to have some influence?

**Alistair Burt:** The short answer to that must be yes. I cannot imagine a conversation between the Prime Minister and the President of the United States that would not cover such a significant world issue, in which of course the United States does indeed have an important part to play.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): Article 53 of the Geneva convention expressly prohibits the destruction of property in occupied territory other than for military purposes. Given that there can be no possible military purpose in destroying the residential community of Khan al-Ahmar, does my right hon. Friend agree with my assessment that, even as we speak, the state of Israel is committing a war crime?

**Alistair Burt:** I am not sure whether the UK is in a position to make that judgment, but certainly, as has been made clear, the United Nations has already said that it could constitute forcible transfer and clearly now that things have actually begun that matter becomes a much sharper one for consideration.

**Andy Slaughter** (Hammersmith) (Lab): I have visited Khan al-Ahmar twice and have met many of the families there. This is a personal violation for them, as well as a war crime, but it is also a strategic step. There are 46 Bedouin villages and their future may well hang on whether the Israeli authorities get away with the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar. This allows for the splitting of the west bank and for the annexation, which is now openly talked about, of the west bank by Israel to take place. If not now, when are the Government going to act? When are they going to act against illegal settlements and end trade? When are they going to recognise Palestine and when are they going to recognise their historical obligations and take a lead internationally, rather than wringing their hands?

**Alistair Burt:** I say again that it is my view—and, I think, the view of the Government—that we want to keep the opportunity of the two-state solution open and viable. That requires remaining in contact with the Government of the state of Israel. All these issues—the concerns about the building of settlements and their strategic position—are a vital part of the land jigsaw that the envoys are presumably working through and
they must come forward as the basis for negotiations between the Palestinians and the state of Israel. It should be the United Kingdom’s job to do everything it can to keep those channels and opportunities open, and the actions that we will take in response to this will be in accordance with those principles.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the village of Khan al-Ahmar is in area C of the west bank, that under the Oslo accords it is under the direct control of Israel and that the Israeli courts have ruled it to be an illegal settlement? Will he also confirm that the Government of Israel have offered alternative accommodation with running water and proper civilisation?

Alistair Burt: Both those statements from my hon. Friend are true, as far as they go.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Alistair Burt: It is just a question of what the background and context might be. The settlements in the area are deemed illegal, but between 2014 and the summer of 2016 just 1.3% of building permits requested by Palestinians in area C were granted, and between 2010 and 2015 only 8% of all building permits in Jerusalem were given in Palestinian neighbourhoods. Practically, this leaves Palestinians with little option but to build without permission, placing their homes at risk of demolition on the grounds that they do not have a permit. While recognising Israel’s judicial system and recognising the rights that it believes it has in relation to this, other circumstances have to come into consideration, which is why the United Kingdom takes the view that it does about this demolition.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): For the two Bushes, Clinton and Obama, building on area E1, where Bedouins have grazed sheep and goats for years, was a red line, but now, under Trump, there are no red lines. Does the Minister not appreciate that his concern, disappointment and bemusement—as I think he even said—do not seem enough when bulldozers will literally be concreting over all hopes for a two-state solution by constructing a continuous west bank settlement?

Alistair Burt: The hon. Lady makes her own points very strongly. It is right that this has been considered a red line, for the reasons that she has set out. It has yet to be seen what the international reaction to this will be.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend see the link between this urgent question and the debate later today in Westminster Hall in the name of the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan), the chair of Labour Friends of Israel, about incitement in the Palestinian education system? These cruel and illegal actions form part of an unshakeable Palestinian perception of Israeli policy over five decades in the occupied territories that breeds the anger and despair that contribute to an environment of historic hatred that is going to become almost impossible to reverse.

Alistair Burt: My own observation, from my recent visit, is that the separation is growing, particularly between young people. Whereas there are older people in Palestinian areas and in Israel who can talk about living in each other’s villages and about times past, that now seems impossible for some younger people. This is built on the failure over many decades to reach a solution that would allow that sort of life to continue. I do not think there is any future unless the people of Israel and the Palestinian people find a way back—with all the security guarantees that need to be given—to the sort of life where their security is built on their neighbours and not on walls and division.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): I have also had the honour and privilege of visiting Khan al-Ahmar, where I met many wonderful people who were just trying to live in peace and do the best for their families and their community. Surely the time has now come for the British Government formally to recognise the state of Palestine. Surely the time has also come for us to impose sanctions and cease all trade with the illegally occupied territories.

Alistair Burt: I hear what the hon. Gentleman says. That is not the policy of the United Kingdom, for reasons that we have given before, but I have indicated that we are in consultation with European colleagues and considering what response there might be to these circumstances.

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I consider myself a friend of Israel and a strong supporter of a two-state solution, but is it not the case that these demolitions cast serious doubt on Israel’s own commitment to those objectives?

Alistair Burt: Again, the short answer is a worrying yes. Israel has many friends around the world. I count myself as a friend of the middle east as well as a friend of individual separate states. In my experience, the determination to reach a just solution had slipped down the agenda of the world in recent years, but it has now gone back up the agenda, partly as a result of President Trump’s decision on Jerusalem and partly as a result of the feeling that, although we have said it many times before, maybe there is just one last chance before we get into a situation that none of us wishes to see. It is possible that the events of today, a little like the catalyst of Gaza recently, might be a further reminder that that chance is slipping away and that the door might be closing all too quickly.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Minister, for whom I have enormous regard, has described how British officials were taken by surprise this morning when they went to visit the villages and found bulldozers on site—

Alistair Burt: indicated dissent.

Lady Hermon: They were not surprised?

Alistair Burt: They were not surprised, ma’am. They went there because they knew that things were happening. They were not taken by surprise.
Lady Hermon: I thank the Minister for that clarification. They were not taken by surprise, but they went there because they feared that demolitions were going to take place. I would like to be reassured that, when the reports came back that the bulldozers were indeed on site, the Foreign Office immediately contacted the White House and asked the Americans to use the influence that they seem to have in Israel to save those villages from demolition. Did that happen? Have we contacted the White House? Did the Foreign Secretary make that call? Did the Prime Minister make that call? Did anyone in the British Government make that call to the White House?

Alistair Burt: Forgive me—I do not know the answer to that question. I have been dealing with DFID questions in the House this morning and then I moved on to this. I do not know what official contact there has been between us and the United States, but the hon. Lady asks an extremely good question. I cannot imagine that in dealing with this issue we are not in direct contact with our friends in the United States, and I will certainly make sure that we are.

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): Strong concerns have been expressed this afternoon, and I join those calls for the demolitions to be halted. Israel has provided welfare for the rapidly growing Bedouin communities and proposed solutions to improve their quality of life. Does the Minister recognise that Israel is trying to work with those communities to resolve this undeniably sensitive situation?

Alistair Burt: I know from my previous experience that, again, the short answer is yes. Proposals have been put forward, including by Benny Begin some years ago, and a lot of work has been done with the Bedouin community from the Negev and in the area. However, there is a fundamental point at which people’s rights, feelings and desires have to be taken into account. In this particular instance, it is not deniable that Israel has indeed come forward with alternative accommodation, but the question is, as it would be for any of us: if someone offers us something, we have a choice whether to accept it, but if that choice is taken away, the circumstances are rather different. What we have sought to stress to Israel is that, although this particular case has been through its legal system and alternatives have been provided, this is not what that community, which has already been moved, wanted. Accordingly, many people believe that those rights and wishes should be somehow taken into account, in a state that values and prizes the need for rights and laws to protect the most vulnerable, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Mid Sussex (Sir Nicholas Soames) said. He is surprised that that has not been the case.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has said that the demolition of structures in the Khan al-Ahmar encampment would be a violation of international law and has called on the Israeli authorities to stop it. If the demolition goes ahead, which is likely given the previous record of the Israeli authorities, do the Government intend to take steps to hold the authorities to account for their actions?

Alistair Burt: I am only repeating what I said earlier, which is that we are in discussion with other partners about what the response might be, but I hope that I made clear the UK’s deep concern and our condemnation of an action that threatens the two-state solution.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): There is clearly a strong feeling today that we need more than just condemnation. Given that Israel’s settlements, the demolitions and the forcible transfer of people are illegal under international law, the British Government could tell UK businesses that they should not collude with illegality in their commercial dealings with the settlements any more than they should collude with illegality in the UK.

Alistair Burt: I hear the hon. and learned Lady’s views and understand where they come from, but that has not been our policy in the past. We have left the choice to people who know the background and the circumstances that relate to settlements and their produce. However, as I said earlier, the UK reserves all its actions while it considers what it might do.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): I, too, am a friend of Israel, which is why I will not pretend that what is taking place today is happening out of some concern for the welfare of the Bedouin community in Khan al-Ahmar or is the result of some planning dispute. What is happening is a deliberate policy intention of the present Israeli Government, who have no regard or concern for a two-state solution and simply want to expand illegal settlements, which will ultimately undermine the security and legitimacy of the Israelis and grossly infringe the human rights of Palestinians. Having been to Khan al-Ahmar and knowing what lies ahead if the demolition happens without a serious international response, I have to say that if Israel is going to demolish Palestinian villages on the grounds that they are illegal settlements, is it not time for this country and our European partners to take targeted economic sanctions against illegal Israeli settlements in the west bank?

Alistair Burt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to what I said previously about potential action. Like one or two other Members, he speaks from a background of support and understanding for the state of Israel and therefore with even greater concern and upset at what is happening and the reasons behind it. He will have spoken for many both inside and outside, just as others have done.

Julie Elliott (Sunderland Central) (Lab): We are now hearing of dozens of Palestinians being hospitalised as a result of the tragedy of the start of the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar this morning. That demolition is a war crime, so how will the British Government ensure that Israeli decision makers are held to account for what has happened today?

Alistair Burt: May I start by thanking the hon. Lady for trying to get hold of me today? I got the telephone message a little too late to respond, but I appreciate that she attempted to get in touch.

I said earlier that the British ambassador would be joining a démarche of Israel this afternoon in response to the actions that have been taken. I assure the hon. Lady, as I assured the House, that there is no shortage
of opportunity for either Ministers or our ambassador or consul general to make a case. It is not the lack of making a case that is the concern; it is the lack of listening to the case. Accordingly, we need to see, in consultation with others, what we can do. We have different views about the future security of the state of Israel, but I wish that we were all coming from the same place. We will continue to make our case as strongly as we can.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): Like so many Members, I was inspired by the community of Khan al-Ahmar when I visited last November, and I know that the Minister was, too. B’Tselem, the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights, has said that the demolition is a war crime, but it also highlights our potential influence in stopping such crimes as a member of the UN Security Council with deep cultural, diplomatic and commercial ties with Israel worth more than £7 billion in annual bilateral trade. I know that the Minister cares about this issue and that the Government have issued strong words, but is it not time to go beyond words and to start using all possible leverage to stop illegal demolitions?

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said. Of course, if there was an agreement, the land rights would be sorted out as part of it, so we would not have such issues. The imperative remains to seek and reach an agreement between the Palestinians and the state of Israel that ends such risks. Today’s actions make it even more imperative that that happens even more urgently, to protect the rights of Palestinians and, indeed, to see Israel granted the security it needs in an ultimate agreement relating to the conflict.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I have just heard that 35 people have been injured so far today as a direct result of the demolition. I know the Minister to be a very decent man, so will he pledge specifically to investigate why JCB bulldozers were used in the demolition of homes, given that it is certainly a serious breach of international law, if not a war crime?

Alistair Burt: I in turn greatly respect the hon. Lady and will indeed ensure that that investigation is carried out.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Without wanting to impugn the Minister’s personal integrity—I hold him in the highest regard, although we do not agree on this—regret and condemnation are not enough. We have international obligations, not least those specified in the last line of the Balfour declaration, which states that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the... rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Palestinian settlements are being demolished to make way for illegal Israeli settlements, which is a breach of international law, so are we going to call the Israeli ambassador in? Are we going to tell him that we will no longer trade with those illegal settlements? I suggest that that is what we need to do.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman has a long held a passionate commitment to this cause and has a fair way of expressing it, and it is true that we do not always agree. We will of course be in contact with the Israeli ambassador, but I cannot anticipate the actions of the British Government at this stage.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): Like the Minister, I had the privilege of visiting Khan al-Ahmar just last September. Part of the site includes a school with 170 children that was part-funded by the EU, so will the Minister set out what representations he has made to the Israeli Government for reparations if the school is to be demolished? The EU and the British Government must be far stricter, because this situation involves children, and Israel is in breach of article 50 of the Geneva convention.

Alistair Burt: The UK has not directly funded any structures in recent years that have been demolished by the Israeli Government. We have consulted EU partners on the demolitions, and we are keeping the case for compensation under review. No decision has been made about whether we will claim compensation in future. We are focused on preventing demolitions from happening through our funding to a legal aid programme that helps residents to challenge decisions in the Israeli legal system. Our work with the Norwegian Refugee Council has been extremely effective over the years in providing a counter to some of the demolition applications.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): I, too, have visited the village of Khan al-Ahmar, and I am one of the 25 MPs who signed a letter saying that this forcible transfer is a war crime. Rather than condemning the action and reserving our options, we need to hear more from the Minister about what will be done to hold those responsible to account. Does he accept that the longer he ducks the issue of allowing trade with illegal settlements and not recognising the state of Palestine, the vicious circle will just continue until it is too late?

Alistair Burt: I understand, particularly the hon. Gentleman’s last point. I have indicated that the British ambassador is taking part in a démarche this afternoon in relation to the Israeli Government. We are in consultation with European partners and colleagues on what actions might be taken. I cannot say anything further than that.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): Some 181 people live in Khan al-Ahmar, and more than half of them are children. The Minister has acknowledged that the actions of the Israeli Government are contrary to international law, but those actions are also simply cruel. As we have heard, people are being injured by this demolition process. It is a grievous situation. What plans do the Government have to contribute towards humanitarian assistance efforts for the people who are being forcibly displaced?

Alistair Burt: We are very active in all areas of the west bank in supporting humanitarian needs through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and the like. Plainly, we did not wish to see this demolition and, in company with others, we must now consider what we can do to support those who have been displaced. This is obviously very immediate, and I will report back to the House as soon as we have a clear answer to the hon. Lady’s concerns.
Alex Cunningham (Stockton North) (Lab): We are kidding ourselves if we think we can stop this illegal work with diplomacy. Diplomacy has always failed in the past, so something else needs to be done. The Minister has responded four times on the issue of banning the import of Israeli goods produced in illegal settlements, but he says such a ban has not been British policy in the past. Does that mean he is considering a change? If not, why not?

Alistair Burt: There are circumstances in which a Minister cannot win, no matter what he says. I am accurate in saying that that is the current policy, but I also indicated, without any suggestion of a change in policy, that the United Kingdom’s response to today’s activities has not yet been fully considered. We are talking through with other partners what that response might be. I do not want to set any hares running by saying any more in response to the hon. Gentleman’s question.

Matthew Pennycook (Greenwich and Woolwich) (Lab): The demolition of Khan al-Ahmar and the forcible transfer of its population represents a step change in the situation of the occupation. The Minister has recognised that it could well deal a fatal blow to a two-state solution. As he has said, representations making the case to his Israeli counterparts clearly have not worked. Does he accept that this is the moment for a fundamental reappraisal of the Government’s approach?

Alistair Burt: The short answer is probably no, because the fundamental determination of the Government’s approach is to do everything we can to keep the option of a two-state solution alive and to work with all parties, including the state of Israel, towards that end. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right in saying that, because of the long-standing international concern about this community and because of the recognition of the significance of where the community is, the actions taken today constitute, in his words, a “step change” in what is happening. I do not think that stage has yet been reached. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right in saying that that ultimate settlement is the only thing that will deal with all these matters. So long as a determination that that ultimate settlement is the only thing that will deal with all these matters. So long as a determination that ultimate settlement is the only thing that will deal with all these matters.

Alistair Burt: That is a good question. At what stage do we give up on a two-state solution? I do not want to give up on all those friends over the years, or those behind the Oslo accord and on those who worked so determinedly for a two-state solution. I do not want the United Kingdom to be in a position of saying, “We are washing our hands of this,” but there comes a point when it is completely impossible. Until the envoys have reported and until the work has been done, I do not think that stage has yet been reached. Each issue that makes it more difficult, as we have seen today, runs the risk of that day coming closer.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Israel will rightly face international condemnation and obloquy for these actions, but the demolitions will go ahead anyway. Aside from the Trump regime in America, which is part of the problem, is there anybody out there to whom Israel might listen? The impression it gives at the moment is of a state going rogue that does not actually want to be part of the international community.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman puts it very forcefully. Israel co-operates in a variety of international organisations, and all the states that work with Israel must and should have some influence with it. He is right to talk about the United States, which is plainly its major relationship, but Israel has a strong relationship with the EU and it has a growing relationship with a number of other Arab states in the region.

This has to be a relationship built not only on what Israel is but on what Israel is to become. Accordingly, such actions raise question marks that friends do not wish to see. Let us see where the influence can be, and let us try to work together so that the Israel we see today, and the Israel we want to see, is the Israel that will be staunch in defence of rights, secure in its own existence and supported by its neighbours, but that works for a just settlement with those who live in the Palestinian areas and in Gaza.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): Following this shameful demolition, what must the state of Israel do for this Government to act? That has to be the question. The Minister has said many times this afternoon that it is not UK Government policy, but does he agree that the time has come for the UK at least to examine genuinely hard-hitting, far-reaching economic sanctions, because negotiation, pleading and appeals to international law have demonstrably failed?

Alistair Burt: I can only repeat what I said earlier. Our policy remains a determination to do everything we can to see that the two-state solution remains viable, to do nothing that will make it less likely and to work with others who are determined to see it become a possibility. All our actions and responses should still be guided by those principles.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): We have now been discussing this for 50 minutes, and I have yet to hear the Minister state a single practical action that the Government propose in response to this atrocity. Like others in this House, I do not doubt his sincerity, but I am alarmed by his reticence to do something about it.
Tommy Sheppard: The Minister has hinted that the Government are considering further measures, and he has alluded to discussions with international partners. If the Government themselves are not prepared to take action in the field of economic sanctions to try to put pressure on Israel, will he give a commitment that this Government will not oppose such measures if they are proposed by other Governments in international forums?

Alistair Burt: I understand the hon. Gentleman’s admonitions, but I will not make policy standing here at the Dispatch Box. I indicated that this needs a considered response, which we are undertaking in company with others. I am sorry that is not as neat as a swift, immediate response, but I think it is the right response. We will consider with others what to do.

I have listened very carefully to the House, and I hope others have listened to the feeling the House has expressed and take due note of the deep concerns that Members have rightly expressed, whatever position they have taken in the past, about the actions that have taken place today. I hope those concerns will go loudly around the world.

Sustainable Fisheries

Michael Gove: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the future for Britain’s fishing industry. Today, we are publishing a White Paper, “Sustainable Fisheries for Future Generations”, which sets out how we can benefit both our economy and our environment when we leave the European Union, and take back control of our seas.

The United Kingdom is blessed by waters that contain some of the historically richest fishing grounds in the world. Those waters sustained a fishing industry that was at the heart of coastal communities from Shetland to Cornwall. Thousands were employed in catching, processing and marketing fish, which enjoyed a global reputation for excellence. But in recent decades both the health of our fishing industry and the management of our fish stocks has been undermined by the operation of the European Union’s common fisheries policy. As a result of the CFP, more than half of the fish in our own waters has been caught by foreign vessels. Access to fishing opportunities has been allocated according to out of date formulae which do not properly reflect either changes in our global climate or advances in marine science. During our membership of the CFP, we have seen jobs in fisheries decline, businesses go to the wall and communities hollowed out, but now that we are leaving the EU and taking back control of our waters, a brighter future beckons.

Today’s White Paper outlines how, as an independent coastal state, under international law, we will be in control of the seas that make up our exclusive economic zone—the waters up to 200 nautical miles out from our coastline or halfway between our nation and others. We will determine, in annual negotiations with our neighbours, who has access to our waters. We will also ensure that any additional fishing opportunities then available to our vessels are allocated fairly and thoughtfully to help support vessels of all sizes and communities across the UK. Fisheries will be a separate strand of our future relationship with the EU from the future economic partnership. Through the fisheries strand there will be a separate process, whereby the EU and the UK, as an independent coastal state, will negotiate on access to waters and fishing opportunities on an annual basis.

Outside the CFP, we can also be more ambitious environmentally; we can make sure that our future fishing policies are truly sustainable and that they protect and enhance marine habitats, in line with the goals of our 25-year environment plan. Sustainability is key to a successful fisheries industry. We will continue to work under the principle of maximum sustainable yield, and we will use the best available science to create a policy that ensures profitability and resilience for decades to come. We are fortunate that Britain is a world leader in fisheries science and marine conservation, and we will use that expertise and the flexibility that comes from...
new fishing opportunities to ensure the current methods of managing stocks, such as the ban on discarding fish caught over quota, work better and in the interests of both the industry and the environment.

We will also ensure that all foreign vessels seeking to fish in our waters will be allowed to do so only if they adhere to our high sustainability standards. We will deploy the most sophisticated monitoring technology to ensure those standards are rigorously policed and upheld. We will deploy not only technology, but the vessels, aircraft and people required to safeguard our waters. We will also consider whether and how to replace the European maritime and fisheries fund, which has supported the sector across the UK.

Of course, delivering for the UK fishing industry depends on close collaboration with the devolved Administrations. The White Paper sets out our approach to develop a UK framework for fisheries management that will respect the devolution settlements, and, where necessary, we will maintain the overall coherence of the UK’s fisheries policy. This will help deliver our international obligations and protect the functioning of the hugely important UK internal market.

However, there are specific opportunities that this White Paper outlines where we can better support the sector in England. We can look at new opportunities for those in the current under-10 metre category, who have suffered particularly badly from some aspects of past policy. We can also look at running a targeted scientific trial system based on effort, or days at sea, rather than a quota for some low-impact inshore fisheries, although of course any trial would have to ensure that the system’s operation was consistent with our commitment to sustainable fishing.

Over the past year, this Government have explained how we can deliver a green Brexit—a suite of measures that replaces the existing common agricultural policy and CFP with new approaches that better serve both our economy and the environment. Alongside replacements for the CAP and CFP, we have also introduced policies that contribute to a cleaner, greener planet and, in particular, healthier, more resilient rivers, seas and oceans. We have introduced reforms to the water industry; introduced a world-leading ban on the plastic microbeads in rinse-off personal care products; called for evidence of managing stocks, such as the ban on discarding fish caught over quota, work better and in the interests of both the industry and the environment.

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We have worked with other nations, through the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance and the G7, to further enhance the health and productivity of our marine environment, and the global leadership the Prime Minister has shown in securing cleaner seas has been recognised by the United Nations. Now, with our departure from the European Union, we can demonstrate even more ambitious leadership in our own waters. We can regenerate our coastal communities. We can ensure our fishing industry enjoys an economic renaissance, and we can do so by putting the highest environmental standards at the heart of everything we do. This White Paper charts that course, and I commend it to this House.

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): The Secretary of State made fisheries the poster child for the leave campaign, and a number of promises were made to the fishing industry and coastal communities about what Brexit would mean for them. So far, he has categorically failed to deliver, and there are fears that this White Paper is just more of the same. There is a huge gap between his vision and what he actually ends up delivering. Promises made about taking back control of waters during transition will not be delivered, despite what Ministers said right up to the point of their U-turn. This went against assurances the Secretary of State gave to this House and to coastal communities to take back absolute control of waters on day one, and he went on to assess his own performance as delivering a “sub-optimal outcome” for the fishing industry.

This White Paper is full of optimism for the negotiations, but the only deal so far agreed on fishing is that we will keep EU fishing policies during the transition period. We are not holding our breath that this will all go according to plan. Future customs arrangements will be key to the fishing industry, but given reports that the Secretary of State physically ripped up the Prime Minister’s preferred customs option, it is clear that the big decisions for the negotiations, including those on fishing, are a long way from being agreed. Some 70% of what we catch we export, and 80% of the fish we eat, we import. Why should the fishing industry believe his rhetoric today when fundamental questions on customs go unanswered? Trade and access are entirely separate issues according to the White Paper. So far, nothing about the EU’s negotiating position says this will work, so how realistic does he think this position is?

I welcome the commitment to be environmentally ambitious. In that case, will the Secretary of State support Labour’s proposals for national marine parks? I also welcome his commitment to collaboration with the devolved Administrations. What clarity can he give on the future fisheries workforce, including EU workers, who are so vital for the catching sector? Will every penny of European maritime and fisheries fund be replaced, and what is the mechanism for delivering that? Will the Treasury be taking a slice, as it plans to do for agricultural subsidies?

The White Paper talks warmly about the coastal communities fund, but a recent parliamentary question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) revealed that only about 6% of the fund has been awarded to the fishing sector to date. If the Government really think fishing is the lifeblood of fishing communities, why are they not backing this up with the funding that the industry desperately needs? We do not have to wait until Brexit to give the small businesses that are the backbone of our fishing sector a better deal. The Secretary of State has powers today to replaced, and what is the mechanism for delivering that? Will the Treasury be taking a slice, as it plans to do for agricultural subsidies?

The White Paper talks warmly about the coastal communities fund, but a recent parliamentary question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) revealed that only about 6% of the fund has been awarded to the fishing sector to date. If the Government really think fishing is the lifeblood of coastal communities, why are they not backing this up with the funding that the industry desperately needs? We do not have to wait until Brexit to give the small businesses that are the backbone of our fishing sector a better deal. The Secretary of State has powers today to adjust quotas and to help, especially, the under-10 metre fleet. So will he make a commitment today not to wait until Brexit to do the right thing and help those boats?

There is no point in catching more fish if it is going to rot at our border, awaiting export, trying to reach markets. Fishing communities such as those I represent need a fairer deal for their fishing industry and to coastal communities to take back absolute control of waters on day one, and he went on to assess his own performance as delivering a “sub-optimal outcome” for the fishing industry.

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If the Secretary of State thinks he can avoid scrutiny on the promises made to the fishing sector in the past, he is sadly mistaken. Warm soundbites do not reassure coastal communities. I assure the Secretary of State that Labour will be holding his feet to the fire to ensure that the promises that he makes today are delivered.

Michael Gove: I thank the hon. Lady for her generous welcome of so much of the White Paper. I thank her, too, for reflecting on its optimistic tone, which reflects the sunny disposition that is always there in DEFRA Ministers’ statements.

The hon. Lady asked what we have already achieved. Not only have we already achieved withdrawal from the London fisheries convention, but we have made it clear, as has the European Union, that although we of course will have a transition process, in the December 2020 Council—that is, even before the transition process ends—the UK will be treated as an independent coastal state and will negotiate as a third country. The European Union acknowledges that we will be leaving and negotiating separately at that point, and that is something that the whole House, and certainly the Opposition, can welcome.

The hon. Lady referred to the fact that 70% of the fish that we catch is exported, and of course it is, because, as I mentioned in my statement, it is high-quality fish caught by the brave men and women who go to sea. We will of course ensure through our future economic partnership, which is being negotiated separately, that we continue to have as-frictionless-as-possible access to European markets. Michel Barnier, someone whom I hugely admire, has himself pointed out that he wants to ensure that the free trade agreement that is concluded between the UK and the EU has neither quotas nor tariffs, so we can look forward to a bright future there, as well.

The hon. Lady mentioned national marine parks. That sounds like a great idea, but while Labour has been talking in the abstract about national marine parks, the Government have been getting on with the hard work of designing and protecting new marine protected areas around our coastline. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) has built on the work of my right hon. Friend the former Fisheries Minister, quota has already been reallocated to support the under-10 metre fleet.

I wish to make one final point, which I suspect I may make a couple of times this afternoon. These opportunities arise as a result of our departure from the common fisheries policy. When an opportunity was given to vote for absence and departure from the common fisheries policy in the European Parliament, Labour Members of the European Parliament voted against it. It is all very well to will the end, but unless someone supports the means, which Labour has not done, they are not a true friend of our fishermen.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): My right hon. Friend will know that there is no greater critic of the common fisheries policy than me, but I am sure he would agree that even had we not gone into it, we would probably still have a problem, because man’s technical ability to harvest vast quantities from the sea has been a problem the world over. I very much hope that the White Paper contains a firm commitment to an ecosystems approach to fisheries management and that within that there is the possibility of rebalancing fishing opportunity to try to assist the smaller, more local fishing fleet and give it a fairer cut of the opportunity.

Michael Gove: When my right hon. Friend was a DEFRA Minister, he contributed significantly to improvements to the common fisheries policy, and fishing and coastal communities throughout the United Kingdom owe him a particular debt. He is right on both his points: in or out of the CFP, we have to make sure that conservation measures are at the heart of our future policy, and it is also right that we do more, particularly for coastal communities where they use inshore vessels, to ensure that opportunities are reallocated to benefit them and the communities and businesses built around them.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): We have heard so much about red lines since 2016, but those red lines might now be considered red herrings. I have read the documents issued this morning. Given the commitment to “continue work with our European partners to regulate fishing and to set harvest rates”, will the fleets still be subject to the CFP, but without a Minister at the table when decisions are being made?

Given that maximum sustainable yield has been established and the Secretary of State has already made it clear to the Danish fleet that it and all others will still be welcome to fish in UK waters, will our fleets continue to be subject to the same quotas as they currently are?

Given that the UK Government “will consider whether and how to replace” the European maritime and fisheries fund, is there a possibility that the fleets will receive reduced funding, or that funding might be redistributed on an uneven footing to suit a Government’s political ends? Is there even a possibility that the fleets will no longer receive funding at all? I note the point about the World Trade Organisation wanting to see an end to fisheries subsidies, but wonder whether raw, unfettered competition is really best for Scotland’s fishing fleet.

On partnership working, the Government say that frameworks will “not normally” be changed without the devolved Administrations’ consent. That “not normally” bothers me. May we have a guarantee that frameworks will not be put in place without the explicit agreement of the Scottish Government? Welsh and Northern Irish Members will no doubt press a similar case. May we also have a guarantee that no future changes will be made without unanimity—that no Administration will be overruled?
Finally, before Mr Speaker’s eyes turn disapprovingly upon me, I note the establishment of an English marine management reserve; will that have Barnett consequentials?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Lady’s anxiety was misplaced, as she had 14 seconds to spare. She was a model citizen and will now be esteemed throughout the House.

**Michael Gove:** In response to the hon. Lady’s questions, I think the answers are no, no, no, and yes.

The Scottish National party’s position on future fisheries is an uncomfortable one, because it has in the past represented some of the most important fishing communities in this country, but does so no longer. One reason why it no longer represents those communities in this House is its failure to stand up for them and its failure to demand our exit from the common fisheries policy. There is a fundamental weakness that no amount of faux outrage or weak punning can mask. I have the highest regard for individuals in the Scottish Government who are trying to work with us and our superb team of civil servants to ensure that we have frameworks that safeguard Scottish fishermen’s interests, but Scottish fishermen have no friends among the Scottish National party representatives in this place, which is why the SNP Benches are so scantly and their arguments even thinner.

**John Redwood** (Wokingham) (Con): Is this not a great Brexit opportunity to restore our fishing grounds and rebuild our fishing industry? Is it not the case that we have a huge opportunity to make sure that much more of our fish is landed by our boats, so that we ensure that our traditional fish and chips once again includes fish from our fishing grounds, properly looked after by a national policy?

**Michael Gove:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. During the referendum campaign, he made a passionate and coherent case for many of the benefits that could accrue to Britain as a result of leaving the EU. My friend outside this House, the leader of the Scottish Conservatives, Ruth Davidson, who argued for a slightly different position during the referendum, made the point that when it comes to fish, certainly in the Conservative party, we are all Brexiteers now.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. As he said, “a brighter future beckons”. Will he confirm that, when we leave the EU and get fishing back into our own hands again and under our own control, the fishing-village initiatives and the grant assistance will still be available, so that our fishing sector will be sustainable for the long term?

**Michael Gove:** Absolutely. It is our commitment to make sure that we support all the coastal and fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom that have suffered in the past, but for which a brighter future does beckon.

**Mr Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire) (Con): You will remember, Mr Speaker, that in 2005, having travelled all round the British Isles and visited many fishing nations in the north Atlantic and the Falklands, the Conservative party published a Green Paper on how a sane fisheries policy would be run and managed, and we fought the 2005 general election on that paper. This is a really great day. I heartily congratulate the Secretary of State for his clear statement that we will take control of the 200 miles. We said at the time: “The Common Fisheries Policy is a biological, environmental, economic and social disaster; it is beyond reform.”

Its most egregious fault is the disgusting issue of quota discards, whereby it is estimated that up to a million tonnes of fish are thrown back dead every year. The Secretary of State has gone into great detail. In the transition period, will trials be carried out on refined effort control, employing catch-composition percentages?

**Mr Speaker:** I am glad to see that the right hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) is back in the House and in rude health. May I just say that I do hope that, one day, he will tell us what he really thinks?

**Michael Gove:** It is great to see my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) back in his place. He has been a pioneer of many of the policies that we are announcing today, and I am in his debt. It is the case that we have talked about introducing pilots of some form of effort control—days at sea—providing that that is consistent, of course, with important environmental and sustainable factors. We will be working with the industry to ensure that we bring in those pilots as quickly as possible.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): On the radio this morning, the Secretary of State repeatedly cited Norway and Iceland as models for our future fishing relationship with the rest of Europe. He knows that Norway is in the European economic area, and that Iceland is in the European Free Trade Association, which guarantees them free and unfettered access to the European Union for their exports. Is not his claim that he can claim back quota that other countries currently hold while guaranteeing free and unfettered access for our industry’s vital exports to the European Union another cruel betrayal being perpetrated on our fishing industry?

**Michael Gove:** The right hon. Gentleman served with distinction as a DEFRA Minister, and I take seriously his contributions on this matter. As I stress, there are two separate strands to our negotiations with the EU. There are negotiations that we will have as an independent coastal state. Iceland and Norway are very successful independent coastal states, which have control of their fisheries, and which also ensures that the fish that they catch are successfully exported. We will have a separate set of negotiations as part of the future economic partnership.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): This statement and the White Paper are very welcome as they provide the framework to revitalise the Lowestoft and East Anglian fishing industry. Does the Secretary of State agree that now is the time for regional strategies to be developed within this national framework to ensure that coastal communities derive maximum benefit from Brexit? These strategies should look at issues such as the economic link, protecting the marine environment from such damaging activities as electronic pulse fishing, access to quota for small-scale fishermen and infrastructure investment.

**Michael Gove:** My hon. Friend puts his finger on exactly those issues that we do need to make sure are at the heart of any developed regional strategy, particularly for fishermen in East Anglia. He is absolutely right.
Mr Alan Campbell (Tynemouth) (Lab): The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will allocate more than £250 million to UK fishing communities by 2020. The Secretary of State has chosen to ignore this question twice, so let me ask it in a different form: has the Treasury guaranteed that money after we leave?

Michael Gove: Yes, it has. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that EMFF funding, which is committed before we leave the European Union, will continue to be paid.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): As an independent coastal state, we will be able to decide who can access our waters after 2020 and on what terms, but that will be subject to negotiation. Will the Secretary of State reassure the fishing community in my constituency that its interests will not be traded away after the transition period? In considering the environmental aspects, can he say whether those terms will also include a ban on electric pulse fishing?

Michael Gove: I absolutely share the concern about pulse fishing, which has been articulated by my hon. Friends the Members for Totnes (Dr Wollaston) and for Waveney (Peter Aldous). Yes, absolutely. She and I may differ on one or two aspects of politics, but one of the many things that we are united on is our belief that we need to ensure that, as an independent coastal state, we control access to our waters and that, separately, we secure the deepest and friendliest trade, economic and other relationship with the EU.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: Oh, yes, there are lots of fish in Grimsby. Let us hear about the situation.

Melanie Onn: The Secretary of State made reference in his statement to the fact that more than half the fish in our waters are caught by foreign vessels. If the Government are so committed to supporting UK fisheries, why have four out of the six most lucrative fishing licences in the world been awarded to a Norwegian company rather than SG Fisheries or Fortuna Ltd, both of which are UK-led companies? Is that how he treats his true friends?

Michael Gove: I simply remark that Norway outside the European Union seems to be doing rather well.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The Secretary of State knows that my anger and disappointment at what the UK Government agreed in March was echoed by many fishing communities in Moray. Therefore, I really do welcome what is in this White Paper, which has been roundly welcomed by the fishing industry, with the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation calling it a positive statement for taking back control of our waters. Will he confirm from the Dispatch Box that this UK Conservative Government will not allow a link between access to our waters and access to EU markets? Does he agree that the shambolic position of the SNP is indefensible considering that it wants to go straight back into the hated CFP, and will he accept my invitation to come to Moray to meet Moray fishermen to discuss his vision for the future for the UK as an independent coastal state?

Michael Gove: Those are three bullseyes—back of the net, I am tempted to say, on three occasions. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we have separate negotiations, exactly as he requested. It is also the case, exactly as he points out, that the SNP is in a regrettable position on this issue, and my heart goes out to it and its supporters for having to justify their inconsistencies on this issue. It is always a pleasure to visit his constituency, and I will try to do so later this year.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I welcome the substance of this White Paper? It has many of the things that I have long wanted and that the fishermen in my constituency would want to see there. Of course, whether we see it in the future will depend on the Government’s ability to hold fast on their promises of separating trade and access to waters, or at the very least a bit faster than they were able to hold to their promises on the transitional arrangements. Looking to the future for a fisheries management, the real opportunity here, surely, is to do things differently for our smaller inshore fleets. Will the Secretary of State take as his guiding principle a presumption of local management when it comes to arranging these opportunities for the future?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for the generous and constructive tone that he takes, which is of a piece with all his contributions in this House. Absolutely, in Shetland, in particular, there are communities that we want to work with precisely along the lines that he mentions.

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): My right hon. Friend should know that the fishermen just south of the Scottish border, along the north-east coast, are really pleased to see the progress that has been made with this White Paper, but the issue continues to be how we will tackle the choke species issue, because that is something that continues to concern them.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. One thing that we hope to be able to do is to use additional quota, which we can allocate to UK vessels to help deal with that particular challenge. It is also the case that the White Paper includes proposals, which we hope will make it easier for individual fishermen who catch over quota to be able to land all the fish that they have caught in a way that ensures that we can have environmentally effective management. We look forward to responses from the industry to our proposals.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I thank the Secretary of State for producing this paper and thank him especially for meeting the fishermen and the industry in Northern Ireland, ensuring that some of the points that they raised are reflected in this White Paper. That is a positive message. In his recent meeting with Minister Creed, did he discuss voisinage agreements, or good neighbour agreements, with the Republic of Ireland? Did he take the opportunity to remind the Republic of Ireland that a good deal for us with Europe will mean a good deal for the Republic of Ireland in our sea fisheries waters?
Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to have conversations with a number of representatives of the fishing industry in Northern Ireland, which helped inform the paper. Absolutely, in conversations with Minister Creed and with other Ministers in the Irish Government, we have always sought, both in the voisinage agreement and in other areas, to try to work in the interests of all those who fish in our waters.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. Will he confirm that taking back control of our waters will allow us to design a fisheries policy that will be beneficial not just to the commercial fishing industry, but to recreational sea anglers, and will he bear their interests in mind?

Michael Gove: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. Indeed, the White Paper explains how angling, which is a hugely important part of the life of the nation, can benefit from the additional opportunities that accrue as a result of life outside the European Union. He is absolutely right to underline that, and we look forward to responses obviously not just from the fishing industry, but from recreational and other anglers as well.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State explain the logic behind retaining the existing system of fixed quota allocations for the current quota? As he will know, there has been a great deal of unhappiness about that. Three multimillion-pound companies currently control nearly two thirds of our fishing stock. If he wants to take back control, should we not be reviewing something that is now more than 20 years out of date?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. One of the things that my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon) did when he was a Minister was to establish in law that we could move away from some of the FQAs, but appropriate notice needs to be given to do so because the way in which people exercise those rights has been safeguarded in law. However, the direction of travel that the hon. Lady outlines is one with which I sympathise.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): We will need a growing and sustainable workforce if we are to land more of our own fish, yet approximately half those who undertake the difficult and poorly paid work done by crew on board fishing vessels are from outside the British Isles. What will be done to ensure that we have the workforce that we will need to rely on if we are to land more of our own fish?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I am in conversation with the Immigration Minister and the Home Secretary to ensure that the fishing and fish processing industries will have access to the labour that they need to take advantage of these opportunities.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): I welcome the White Paper and its policies to revive coastal communities, which were being devastated by our membership of the EU and the impact of the common fisheries policy. I know that the Secretary of State is an enthusiastic supporter of the wellbeing of those communities, but given the Government’s record in the negotiations to date, will he give us an assurance and a guarantee that nothing will be conceded or done during negotiations on the future trade arrangement that would dilute the Government’s ability to deliver on the aspirations in the White Paper?

Michael Gove: Absolutely. Today’s White Paper is a document that has been agreed across the Government. It represents the Government’s negotiating position and Government policy, and all Ministers and our negotiating team are united behind it.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend and his whole team at DEFRA for pulling the White Paper together—a lot of work has clearly gone into it. I also thank him for visiting the new fish market in Peterhead in my constituency earlier this week. I think that that was about the third time in the last year that he has visited Peterhead, which is most welcome. However, will he confirm that it is the Government’s position that market access for fisheries products is kept separate from the question of fishing opportunities and access to waters?

Michael Gove: I thank my hon. Friend for the welcome that he and his constituents gave me on Monday, when I visited Peterhead for the third time this year. I also thank him and his Scottish Conservative colleagues for their support and for the detailed analysis that they have provided to ensure that we deliver on this policy. It has been a real pleasure to have Scottish Conservative Members who are absolutely committed to the health of the fishing industry and who—rather than trying to make cheap political points off the back of hard-working men and women, as some other parties in this House have sought to do—have put the welfare of the coastal communities that they represent in this House first. It is an exemplary way in which to proceed.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): The Secretary of State said in his statement: “The White Paper sets out our approach to develop a UK framework for fisheries management that will respect the devolution settlements,” yet he did not properly engage the Scottish Government in the production of this White Paper. He stood at the Dispatch Box and just said, “No, no, no,” to the questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) about framework guarantees.

The White Paper itself says that frameworks will “not normally be adjusted” without the consent of the devolved institutions. We know what those weasel words mean. Page 22 of the document states: “The powers concerning international relations, on access to waters and setting quota, will be exercised at UK level.” Is not that Tory speak for, “The UK Government will do what they want and expect the devolved Administrations to like it or lump it.”?

Michael Gove: No.

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s renewed commitment that we will leave the hated CFP by 2020. The only MPs in Scotland who pledged to leave the CFP during the election campaign were the Scottish Conservatives, because the SNP is
Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is right. Voters in Montrose and Arbroath voted for Scottish Conservatives because they wanted us out of the common fisheries policy. That was why Scottish Conservatives won seats at the last general election, and it why the Scottish National party is in such an embittered position. In Strasbourg and Brussels, its representatives vote to keep us in the common fisheries policy, but in coastal communities, the Scottish National party pretends that it is the friend of fishing communities. I am afraid that such fundamental inconsistency from a party that calls itself the voice of Scotland is frankly a disgrace.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): It is a pleasure to hear the DEFRA Secretary at the Dispatch Box. Even if I am not convinced by half of what he has said, he is always very entertaining, positive and upbeat. With his characteristic enthusiasm, he has repeatedly said that we are taking back control of our waters. For the avoidance of doubt and any ambiguity, are Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough exclusively British waters? Also, has he had the opportunity to speak to his good friend the Foreign Secretary to confirm the clarity that he is going to deliver to the House and the people of Northern Ireland as he steps up to the Dispatch Box?

Michael Gove: The first thing to say is that I am in constant communication with my right hon. Friend. Friend the Foreign Secretary. The hon. Lady’s point about Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough has been very well articulated, but I would not want to cut across my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The hon. Lady is incredibly generous in the compliments that she pays DEFRA Ministers. May I simply say in return that we in DEFRA are huge fans of the hon. Lady?

Neil Parish (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): I congratulate the Secretary of State on an excellent White Paper—the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee greatly looks forward to scrutinising it. Our fishermen will get their fish back. For 40 years, they have been denied that, and it will be great to see. When we do our deals with the EU, will we also negotiate with Norway and Iceland? The fish move around, especially with the temperature of the water, so let us try to ensure that we do actually catch the fish.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I look forward to giving evidence to his Committee and I am grateful to members of his Committee for their support in the preparation of the White Paper. My hon. Friend is absolutely right; of course we are going to be negotiating with the European Union, but we also need to negotiate with other independent coastal states, including Norway and Iceland, in the interests of all who fish in our seas.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): This morning, I contacted the Welsh Fishermen’s Association, which tells me that four weeks of delays to our current trading relationships would leave the Welsh fishing fleet in danger of collapse, and that six weeks of delays would lead to catastrophic business failures. Will the Secretary of State outline how he intends to use his influence in the Cabinet to ensure that Welsh fishermen face neither tariff nor non-tariff barriers when trading with the EU in the future?

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows full well, the Jurassic coast sits in my constituency. Along it, the fishing industry—fishing line and shell fishermen—are relied on very much by local business, as has been described. Three marine conservation zones could be placed along that stretch of coastline. While the fishermen agree to look after fish stocks, they are concerned that the legislative process and the amount of bureaucracy could affect their livelihoods. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the industry that if these zones are implemented, they will not affect the livelihoods of fishermen, who are vital to the tourism sector?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. Of course, the network of marine conservation zones exists to ensure that we can have healthy and sustainable seas for the future. I will, of course, do everything possible to provide reassurance to his constituents. Either I or a DEFRA Minister will make time to ensure that we can see them as well.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Mike Russell, the Scottish Government’s constitutional relations Minister, has said that the UK Government “failed to engage with” the Scottish Government “in any significant or meaningful way before producing its White Paper”. Fergus Ewing, the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy, has said that the Scottish Government were only shown a “final copy a few days before publication”. Are these statements true? If not, will the Secretary of State undertake to place in the Library of the House a full record of the discussions that the Government had with the Scottish Government before publishing this document?

Michael Gove: I do not think that anything in this document is a particular surprise to anyone. Of course we shared it with the Scottish Government. Our superb team of officials at DEFRA has been working with Scottish Government officials to secure an outcome. The hon. Gentleman, for whom I have an enormous amount of respect, has been reduced to processology, because on the substance of the matter, I am afraid that the Scottish National party stands against the interests of Scotland’s fishermen because it wants to keep us in
the common fisheries policy. This processology misses the point, which is that Scotland’s fishermen enjoy fantastic new opportunities as a result of a Conservative Government and the leadership shown by 13 superb Scottish Conservative MPs.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I welcome the Secretary of State’s White Paper and his statement. He will know that the seafood processing sector is of particular interest in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area. I welcome the reference to that in the White Paper, as will the industry. Will he assure me and the industry that he will continue to work closely with it to ensure the continuity of supply that is so vital?

Michael Gove: I absolutely will. The processing sector is absolutely critical. We must make sure, as I said earlier, not just that it has access to the labour it needs, but that we do everything to support it in terms of infrastructure and advocacy.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): Just to be helpful to the Secretary of State, if he checks the European Parliament record, as I am sure he would like to, he will see that the SNP has, of course, consistently voted against the common fisheries policy.

Fishing communities that I represent—who, incidentally, have not elected a Conservative MP for some decades now—benefit hugely from the European maritime and fisheries fund. Can the Secretary of State assure me that any future funds will at least match what those communities would have had if we had remained in the European Union?

Michael Gove: On the most recent occasion that Scottish National party MEPs had an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment, they stuck with the SNP position, which is to remain in the EU and, of course, to remain in the common fisheries policy as well.

I know that the hon. Gentleman—his re-election to this House by a slim but still clear margin is a reflection of his hard work—represents the constituents in Crail, Anstruther and elsewhere with all the energy and devotion that he brings to so many of his duties. He is right about the MFF: we do need to ensure that the future replacement continues to be as generous as before.

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I welcome the statement, which will come as a relief to the sector in Newlyn and west Cornwall and is consistent with promises that have been made by the Secretary of State and the Fisheries Minister in Newlyn. After years of decline and the erosion of the fleet, skills and infrastructure as a result of the common fisheries policy, will the Secretary of State give careful consideration to how he and the Government can now support the sector to prepare for a more active and vibrant fishing sector in small coastal communities and larger ports such as Newlyn?

Michael Gove: Yes, absolutely. It was a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend’s constituency. Of course, Newlyn is one of the most important ports in the south-west. We will do everything that we can to make sure that the harbour gets the investment it needs to regenerate and to take advantage of the additional opportunities that life outside the common fisheries policy can provide.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): Four decades-plus ago, the trawlers of the Humber were sold down the river by our membership of the European Union. There is still huge anger in our area about how they were treated, which probably explains why we sensibly voted by a margin of 67% to leave the EU. I therefore welcome this announcement. May I urge the Secretary of State to work with the Department of Communities and Local Government—or whatever it is called this week—on the management of the coastal communities fund to look at how we can use it to support more of our young people going into the fishing and food processing industries and at how we can grow the sector?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. I think that one of the reasons why the vote to leave was as high as it was in his constituency was not just memories of what had happened four decades ago, but his force of advocacy in putting the case for the benefits of life outside the European Union. He is right that we need to do a lot more for our coastal communities, which face particular social and economic challenges. Reviving the fishing industry and an economic renaissance in fish processing can help, but there is more to do. With a formidable advocate like my hon. Friend for communities such as Brigg and Goole, I am sure that the Government’s feet will be held to the fire.

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): As my right hon. Friend knows, we do not have a very large fishing fleet on the glorious coastline of Clacton-on-Sea, but we do have many fish and chip shops. Will he assure me that, post Brexit, those who fish in our waters will be encouraged to fish sustainably so that we can enjoy the wide variety of fish that we currently do?

Michael Gove: It is always a pleasure to visit my hon. Friend’s constituency, and he is absolutely right. We need to make sure that sustainability is at the heart of everything we do so that we make sure that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy healthy waters and the harvest they bring.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con) rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): And finally, with the prize for patience and perseverance, Steve Double.

Steve Double: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and thank you for saving the best for last.

I warmly welcome the Secretary of State’s statement, which will be hugely welcomed by fishing communities across Cornwall, particularly in Mevagissey and Newquay in my constituency. Will he commit to ensuring that as this policy is developed, the voice of our fishermen is heard and considered loud and clear, and particularly that of the under-10 metre fleet? May I gently remind him of his offer to come and meet the fishermen in Mevagissey? I look forward to seeing him there soon.

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—we do need to make sure that we continue to listen to representatives of the fishing industry, who played a big part in making sure that we got the White Paper to the
position that it is in for publication today. I underline my gratitude to him for his invitation, which I am looking forward to taking up.

Finally, let me say that I am very grateful not just to hon. Members who have contributed so constructively to this exchange but, in particular, to the civil servants at DEFRA, who have done an outstanding job in preparing today’s White Paper. They do a superb job not just in making sure that the environment is at the heart of everything we do with regard to fisheries, but in supporting my hon. Friend the Fisheries Minister at every December Council. I am hugely grateful for the contribution that they make, as we all should be.

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I ask your advice on the process by which the Government should inform Her Majesty’s Opposition of changes to business, including questions? As you will be aware, the Government have amended the order of oral questions to bring Defence questions forward by a week to this coming Monday, but they did not inform me or anyone in the Opposition of this fact. This means that those questions will fall before the NATO summit and before the modernising defence programme reports, so my colleagues will not be able to question the Department on the outcome of those events. What would be considered sufficient pretext to make this request, and what would be the standard procedure for notifying the Opposition? I know that the Secretary of State is rather busy with various extra-curricular activities at present, but should not he, his ministerial team or the Government Whips have shown us the courtesy of notifying us of this important change?

Sir Desмонd Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Of course, by bringing this forward, we will have the opportunity to tee up Ministers on issues before they arise at the summit—and, indeed, we will not be denied the opportunity to question Ministers on the outcome of the summit, because there will be further Defence questions.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his further point of order. I can see that we have two sides of the same story, not surprisingly—that is what this Chamber is for. I am concerned by the point of order put forward by the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), but the arrangement of questions is of course a matter for the Government, not for the Chair. Mr Speaker has no direct input or influence in how these matters are done. I understand that if changes are made to the order of questions, that is usually discussed through the usual channels. If that has not happened on this occasion, it is regrettable.

I understand, though, that the revised rota was actually published by the Table Office on 13 June and that the new dates for Defence and Home Office orals have been visible in the “Future Business” section of the Order Paper since that date. I appreciate, of course, that it is easy to overlook these matters. I understand that the Table Office will explore the best way to highlight changes to the rota in future. However, I am sure that the House has heard both the points made by the hon. Lady and by the right hon. Gentleman—

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con) rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: And it is about to hear a further point from Sir Hugo Swire.

Sir Hugo Swire: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was wondering if you could offer any assistance in enabling those on the Labour
Front Bench to follow parliamentary procedure more closely and to actually read what is printed in good time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the point that the right hon. Gentleman makes. It is of course incumbent upon every Member of the House to look at the Order Paper every day, but there are also matters of courtesy to be observed. I think that those courtesies are usually observed, and if there has been a failure to do so on this occasion, I am quite sure that those on the Treasury Bench have heard these exchanges and that apologies will be forthcoming.

BILL PRESENTED

RAIL PASSENGER (COMPENSATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Bim Afolami, supported by Sir Mike Penning, Tom Tugendhat, Tim Loughton, Huw Merriman, Sir Michael Fallon, Heidi Allen, Anne Main, Teresa Pearce, Mohammad Yasin, Caroline Lucas and Iain Stewart, presented a Bill to make provision for a single compensation scheme for passengers across train operators; to require train operators to pay automatic compensation to season ticket holders and certain other passengers where certain standards of service are not met; to allow train operators to recover compensation paid to passengers from Network Rail in certain circumstances; to establish a body to administer rail compensation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 242).

International Development (Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups)

Motion for leave to introduce a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.41 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision in connection with the protection of children and vulnerable adults in receipt of official development assistance and disaster relief.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to present this ten-minute rule Bill. Safeguarding is one of the most important aspects of the modern workplace. Robust and comprehensive safeguarding procedures aim to ensure that children and vulnerable adults are protected from abuse and exploitation. The abuse of power is wrong in any context, but when it happens in the aid and development sector, it can affect some of the most vulnerable people in the world. When people do not have access to food, clean water, shelter, education or medicine, they place their utmost trust in those who are delivering those services. It is crucial that the voices of victims and survivors are at the heart of this debate.

The recent highly publicised scandals in the aid sector are not new. In 2002, the United Nations published a special report after allegations of sexual abuse were made against UN peacekeepers and non-governmental organisations in a number of African countries. That was followed by a Save the Children report in 2008 and a further UN report in 2015. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my friend, the hon. Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham), who is a long-standing member of the Select Committee on International Development and has been a vocal campaigner for better protection of children and women facing sexual exploitation and abuse—an issue that she highlighted following a visit to the world humanitarian summit in Istanbul in 2016.

In February this year, The Times published the findings of an investigation into the behaviour of some Oxfam staff after the 2011 Haiti earthquake. The most appalling allegations were that humanitarian workers were paying young women and girls for sex. That happened in a community that was facing an extreme humanitarian crisis. The investigation, which was the first in a series, saw the development sector come under intense scrutiny for its safeguarding and reporting mechanisms.

On the back of those allegations, the International Development Committee began an inquiry into sexual exploitation and abuse in the aid sector. We wanted to understand why there had been a failure to protect the vulnerable and how safeguarding practice could be improved. We have received more than 50 pieces of written evidence and taken oral evidence from 20 witnesses. Yesterday, the Secretary of State came before the Committee to reaffirm that victims and survivors will be at the heart of any reforms that the Department for International Development undertakes in this area. Last week, as part of our inquiry, we visited the UN in New York. We wanted to scrutinise directly its safeguarding policies and challenge it to do more to protect vulnerable people.

We also visited the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in Washington to look at how they are reforming their safeguarding mechanisms.
A common concern throughout our inquiry has been the lack of a universal approach to safeguarding to cover aid and humanitarian workers. Kevin Watkins from Save the Children highlighted that in his evidence to us, saying:

“as a sector, we would benefit from legislation that established humanitarian aid work as a regulated sector... We need a globalisation of the DBS system.”

Currently there is no coherent system for vetting prospective aid workers. Many UK-based aid organisations require their staff to pass a basic background check before they can work with the vulnerable in this country. However, those checks do not necessarily extend to people working overseas. I would like to see a system that enables organisations to vet prospective humanitarian workers to check their suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults. Ideally, that system would be comprehensive and global, so people working for multilateral organisations such as the UN and the World Bank and for other Governments would be vetted, as well as those working for non-governmental organisations.

Setting up such a system is surely an urgent priority, but it will be challenging. There are well-documented concerns—for example, about data protection and data sharing—that need to be addressed. There is also the issue of cost. At the moment, the onus is on organisations to fund safeguarding checks, but that could put smaller organisations at a disadvantage. We heard last week that United States Agency for International Development delivery contracts often include funding for these kinds of background checks. If we are to establish a successful vetting and referencing system, DFID should consider how it might help to shoulder the cost for these checks. We raised that with the Secretary of State yesterday, and I was encouraged that the Department recognises the challenge, particularly for smaller organisations. It might be costly in the short term, but vulnerable groups surely need to be kept safe whatever the cost.

The last year has been a watershed for the campaign against sexual harassment and assault. The Me Too movement has rightly focused more closely than ever on the behaviour of people in the workplace. How an organisation deals with issues of harassment and abuse sends a signal about its ethos. There are serious concerns that some humanitarian workers have been let off lightly or even exonerated altogether when instances of harassment have occurred. Allegations that abuse or harassment were swept under the carpet for the sake of organisational reputation have been made against a number of aid agencies. That is not acceptable in any workplace, and all organisations should have robust safeguarding mechanisms against issues of this nature. Over the course of our inquiry, it has become apparent that these mechanisms are nowhere near as robust as they should be in the aid and development sector.

As a result of those concerns, the International Development (Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups) Bill was put together. The purpose is to ensure that all UK aid is provided in a way that is likely to contribute to the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults from sexual exploitation and abuse. For that to be achieved, all workers in the aid sector would be regulated in line with the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006. The level to which these workers would be checked would be similar to the level to which social workers and teachers are checked. The Bill also makes provision for the Secretary of State to bring us into line with any future international regulations, as well as requiring her to produce an annual report on safeguarding within UK aid.

This year, DFID has taken a leading role in addressing the issue of safeguarding. In February, the Secretary of State wrote to all organisations that receive UK aid, asking them to spell out in detail their safeguarding policies. That included NGOs, multilateral partners and other DFID suppliers, numbering well over 1,000 organisations. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has continued to show leadership and a strong personal commitment on this issue.

This Bill alone will not of course solve all the safeguarding problems in the aid sector, but this is an opportunity for the United Kingdom to develop the very best domestic practice. However, global change is required if we are to see real and sustained improvement. The safeguarding summit in October provides a welcome and vital opportunity to push for a global vetting and referencing system, as well as a long overdue platform for survivors and victims. With strong United Kingdom leadership from DFID, we can ensure that the most vulnerable are protected from predatory practices in the future.

I am grateful to have had this opportunity to highlight a very important issue, which the Select Committee that I chair is addressing at the moment, and I thank Members on both sides of the House for their support for the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.
Ordered,
That Stephen Twigg, Mrs Pauline Latham, Mrs Maria Miller, Sarah Champion, Chris Law, Jim Shannon, Caroline Lucas, Layla Moran, Mr Virendra Sharma, Mrs Helen Grant, Paul Scully and Lloyd Russell-Moyle present the Bill.

Stephen Twigg accordingly presented the Bill.
Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October, and to be printed (Bill 243).

SUPPLY AND APPROPRIATION (MAIN ESTIMATES) (NO. 2) BILL
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 56). That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.
Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 56), That the Bill be now read the Third time.
Question agreed to.
Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

IVORY BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)
Ordered,
That the Order of 4 June 2018 (Ivory Bill (Programme)) be varied as follows:
(1) Paragraphs (4) and (5) of the Order shall be omitted.
(2) Proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.
(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.—(David Rutley.)
Ivory Bill

Consideration of Bill, not amended in the Public Bill Committee

New Clause 1

**Requirement to amend definition of ivory**

“(1) Within 12 months of the coming into force of section 35 of this Act, the Secretary of State must lay a draft of an instrument containing regulations under section 35(2) before each House of Parliament.

(2) As soon as practicable after laying a draft of an instrument under subsection (1), a Minister of the Crown must propose a motion to approve the draft instrument in each House of Parliament.

(3) The instrument laid in draft under subsection (1) must amend section 35(1) so as to include ivory from a hippopotamus, killer whale, narwhal, sperm whale, or walrus in the definition of ivory in that section.”—(Sue Hayman.)

This new clause creates a duty to, within 12 months of this section coming into force, lay an instrument in draft which would include in the definition of ivory all the ivory-bearing species listed in an Appendix to the CITES, and to propose to each House that the draft instrument be approved.

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.53 pm

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following:

New clause 2—Report on the international ivory market—

“(1) Within 12 months of section 1 of this Act coming into force, the Secretary of State must publish and lay before each House of Parliament a report on the international ivory market.

(2) The report must as far as practicable analyse the impact of this Act on the demand for ivory in the United Kingdom and in other countries.

(3) The report must consider—

(a) the impact on nations or communities that generate income from ivory of—

(i) the provisions of this Act, and

(ii) international agreements related to the ivory trade,

(b) the work of the Department for International Development in—

(i) reducing the global demand for ivory, and

(ii) mitigating any negative impact of the provisions of this Act on nations or communities that generate an income from ivory.”

This new clause would require a report to be laid before each House of Parliament on the international ivory market, including how the Department for International Development is working to reduce global demand for ivory.

**Government amendments 1 to 4.**

**Sue Hayman:** I rise to speak to new clauses 1 and 2 in my name and in those of my right hon. and hon. Friends. Labour’s new clause 1 seeks to expand the definition of ivory to cover the species included in the convention on international trade in endangered species. Members from both sides of the House have voiced their support for the principle of extending the Bill beyond elephants. This is, after all, the Ivory Bill, not merely the elephant ivory Bill. It is not every day that an Ivory Bill comes around, so who knows when this House will have a similar opportunity to take action? Today provides a unique opportunity to enshrine protections for all ivory-bearing species, particularly those listed under CITES, which are some of those most at risk.

This broadening of the definition of ivory is not just because many CITES species are at risk of becoming endangered, but to stop the focus on banning just elephant ivory and so pushing poachers towards other forms of ivory, including hippo, narwhal, killer whale, sperm whale and walrus ivory. As the Born Free Foundation has stated:

“It would be a tragedy if we worked really hard to save elephants and other species were collateral damage in the process... We recognise that the trade is entrepreneurial and will move to wherever there is an opportunity.”

Both the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the Born Free Foundation stated in their evidence to Members that an extension of the definition of ivory would be welcome, provided that it did not delay the passage of the Bill. During the evidence session, Will Travers of the Born Free Foundation said:

“From 2007 to 2016—just under a decade—78,000 hippos and hippo products were exported by CITES parties. Hong Kong imported 60 tonnes of hippo ivory between 2004 and 2014... Those are not insignificant by any measure—they are enormously significant.”—[Official Report, Ivory Public Bill Committee, 12 June 2018; c. 5, Q2.]

As I have said on the record, the Opposition are keen for this legislation not to be unnecessarily delayed, but we must also ensure that it is the best it can possibly be. There appears to have been a rush to push it through at any cost before the international wildlife conference in October, despite the advice I have been given that this is not achievable: it will not get through all the legislative stages in time for the conference. Will the Minister clarify whether the target has been to get it in place before the conference? Will he explain to the House why the Government have sought to oppose sensible and necessary amendments to the Bill on the basis of not wishing to delay it?

**Sir Hugo Swire** (East Devon) (Con): In the spirit of consensus, will the hon. Lady also take this opportunity to congratulate this Government on being the first to legislate in this area?

**Sue Hayman:** As the right hon. Gentleman will hear, I shall be doing just that later in my speech. That is a very important point, and we do support the Bill.

Will the Minister look again at the arguments the Government made against Labour’s attempts to broaden the scope of the Bill in Committee? One of the arguments was that such an amendment could be challenged under the European convention on human rights. As I said in response in Committee, this is clutching at straws, and it is directly in opposition to the legal advice that I have sought, so I want to put this argument to rest once and for all.

According to the legal advice I have taken, primary legislation can be challenged only on human rights and EU law grounds. I have been informed that in the case of human rights, the argument would have to rest on article 1 of protocol 1 on the peaceful enjoyment of property, which is also subject to a public interest caveat. On that basis, we can justify the inclusion of other creatures—such as on the grounds of endangerment...
that drives it in the communities that are affected. Departmental efforts to tackle this trade and the poverty of State to provide to the House a report on cross-clause 2 sets out a clear responsibility for the Secretary of State to host a crime conference that Britain will tackle of this illegal trade requires international as arms, human trafficking and drugs. The effective has been linked to other forms of organised crime, such as the largest transnational illegal trade, worth over £15 billion our own. The illegal wildlife trade has grown rapidly in simply cannot tackle the global trade in illegal ivory on the banning of wild animals in circuses have been allowed commitments on animal welfare issues such as the Conservative manifestos and how Government banning ivory has drifted in and out of consecutive words of support. We have seen how a commitment to being poached as an alternative to elephant ivory? Does the Minister agree that leaving out those species in the first place was an oversight, and does he recognise that other species, particularly the hippo, are at risk of being poached as an alternative to elephant ivory? New clause 1 goes beyond vague promises and warm words of support. We have seen how a commitment to banning ivory has drifted in and out of consecutive Conservative manifestos and how Government commitments on animal welfare issues such as the banning of wild animals in circuses have been allowed to drop off the agenda. We must not allow the same thing to happen in this case. New clause 2 seeks to focus minds and action on the international nature of the illegal wildlife trade. We simply cannot tackle the global trade in illegal ivory on our own. The illegal wildlife trade has grown rapidly in recent years and is now estimated to be the fourth largest transnational illegal trade, worth over £15 billion a year. The illegal wildlife trade drives corruption and has been linked to other forms of organised crime, such as arms, human trafficking and drugs. The effective tackling of this illegal trade requires international co-operation. In the spirit of the international wildlife crime conference that Britain will host in October, new clause 2 sets out a clear responsibility for the Secretary of State to provide to the House a report on cross-departmental efforts to tackle this trade and the poverty that drives it in the communities that are affected.

Sir Hugo Swire: New clause 2 has some merit, but it seems that it simply requires the Secretary of State to report within 12 months. It says nothing about an annual report on what the Government are doing to help to combat the trade and what targets have been achieved. Why have the Opposition alighted on a single one-off report?

Sue Hayman: The new clause was tabled after we looked at what has happened since China banned ivory in January. Everyone was very excited about that, and believed that it would have a swift impact on ivory poaching. The evidence before us shows that more than six months on, it has not had very much impact. Rather than sitting here being very pleased with ourselves for introducing an ivory Bill, which I am sure we will do, we need to make sure that what we produce is effective in the communities where ivory is being poached. The idea of having a report in 12 months was to see whether what we are doing is having more effect than the Chinese ban. If not, the Government would have an opportunity to review the legislation.

Sue Hayman: If the right hon. Gentleman would like an annualised report and would like to discuss with the other place how that can be pursued after he has supported our proposal, I am sure that that is something that can be considered.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Of course there is merit in studying whether or not these measures work, but new clause 2 asks a very narrow question. Ivory is just one of many illegally traded products. There are all kinds of forestry products, as well as pangolins—one million a year are traded. Rhino horns are traded to the detriment of that species. The ban is just one of many hundreds of initiatives that tackle the illegal wildlife trade. Why focus on one of hundreds of products, and one strand among hundreds of strands of work that we need to tackle the illegal wildlife trade? It seems reductionist, and probably not the best use of money or time.

Sue Hayman: In the same spirit, surely the hon. Gentleman would support new clause 1, which expands the scope of species that are covered. We could say that the Government have a narrow focus in looking only at elephants.

Zac Goldsmith: I look forward to hearing the Minister speak and to a commitment that the ban will extend to other species. My concern about new clause 1 is twofold. First, I am not a lawyer, but I share worries, based on what I have heard, that we might unsettle the Bill by formally on the record.
but it has become an enormous source of laundered ivory. There is a legitimate mammoth trade, as the hon. Lady knows, and it is used as an excuse or opportunity for smugglers to trade elephant ivory under that cover. That is a clumsy way of putting it, but it is a loophole that has been exploited mercilessly. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister, when he makes the commitments that I am looking forward to, will make a commitment to extend the ban, subject to consultation, to all forms of ivory.

Sue Hayman: It is a shame that the hon. Gentleman did not serve on the Bill Committee, because he could have supported our amendment 12, which proposed much of what he has just said.

Looking at how we tackle the illegal trade effectively, hon. Members will agree that we need international co-operation, as I have said. In debate and in Committee, hon. Members have said that we need to look at how we work effectively with the Department for International Development in the communities where poaching takes place. Poverty and corruption drive the trade. We have seen in recent days a terrible example of that with the poaching of Bella, a 20-year-old white rhino with a young calf. Bella was dehorned in an effort to make her less of a target a week before she was shot dead by poachers at Kragga Kamma game park in the Eastern Cape. However, hunters sliced her face to extract the small amount of horn that remained. The grisly discovery of the mutilated carcase of a dehorned rhino, killed for less than one centimetre of horn stump, lying next to her calf underscores the depths of South Africa’s poaching problem. It also underscores the fact that poachers kill for very little ivory, which is why it is important to extend the scope of the Bill.

Will Travers, director of the Born Free Foundation, told the Bill Committee:

“In my view, there is a common linkage with our clear objectives in overall development, which are to deal with poverty and to provide opportunity...If we are not investing in the protected areas where elephants and other species live, we are not doing a great service either to the species we wish to protect or to the people who live literally downstream from those protected areas.”—[Official Report, Ivory Public Bill Committee, 12 June 2018; c. 9, Q12.] International leadership and commitment are needed from DEFRA. I sincerely hope that the Minister will agree to support new clause 2, which would make meaningful the commitment to international action on the illegal ivory trade.

Government amendments 3 and 4 bear an uncanny resemblance to amendment 12, which Labour tabled in Committee, as I mentioned. Labour does not seek to oppose the Government amendments, as it is proper and right that the Secretary of State should have the discretion to include additional species, whether they are CITES-listed or not, at a later date depending on the evidence at the time.

I would like to make clear the difference between Government amendments 3 and 4 and Labour’s new clause 1. They are entirely different and in no way contradict one another. Government amendments 3 and 4 seek to provide powers for the Secretary of State to add CITES and non-CITES listed species to the definition in future if the Secretary of State so wishes. The amendment does not compel or require the Government to do so and it does not specify a timeframe. It is therefore important that both Government amendments 3 and 4, as well as new clause 1, are adopted today to protect the most at risk CITES species as a priority within the next 12 months, as well as providing the Secretary of State with the discretionary powers to include species at an future time if necessary.

This House is united in its determination to clamp down on the ivory trade. Labour’s 2017 election manifesto made a clear commitment to a full ban on ivory sales, and I welcome the Bill today. It is an important step forward in protecting elephants and starting to tackle this appalling trade. The Committee stage was conducted in a spirit of working hard and being constructive together. I recommend both Labour’s new clauses and the Government amendments to the House. We need to close any loopholes in the Bill that might further endanger the walrus, narwhal, sperm whale, killer whale and hippo. I have tried hard to work constructively with the Minister. I ask that he take our concerns and our new clauses very seriously. I urge the whole House to support Labour’s new clauses 1 and 2 today.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It was a pleasure to serve with the hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) and her colleagues and with my right hon. and hon. Friends on the important Bill Committee. It is great to see the Bill on Report. Since before the days of Hannibal, the elephant has been important, totemic and ritualistic in our psyche and in our history. We want to ensure that the elephant, and man’s relationship with that supremely powerful and totemic animal, has not just a present but a future.

From time to time, I toy with trying to win the lottery. If I did, one of the things I would do is take my children on safari in Africa to see, among other animals, elephants. My children are quite young, so I think to myself that I will do that in 10 or 12 years’ time when they are a bit older. I just hope that the elephants will still be there. That, of course, presupposes that I win the lottery. I fundamentally believe that the Bill will have an important role to play in helping to deter the trade, making it morally reprehensible to trade in ivory and to poach, and to act as a beacon of excellence for other countries to follow.

I do not particularly like to be tied into other agendas and the timetable of other agendas, but I have been entirely persuaded, in Committee and on Second Reading, by the comments and assurances given by my hon. Friend the Minister from the Dispatch Box about the importance of getting the Bill through cleanly and swiftly to ensure it hits the statute book at an appropriate time and in a form whereby it can be cited at the important conference in the autumn.

3.15 pm

The hon. Member for Workington will know that I share entirely what she says, but she will not, I am sure, also be surprised to hear that I will vote against her new clauses. Clause 35, which we discussed at some length in Committee, is clearly able to deliver what the hon. Lady and many of us on the Government Benches seek. I take entirely her point and it is not contained in the Government amendments. One of the great joys of
being a Parliamentary Private Secretary, such as I am, is that one is not allowed to table in one’s own name amendments to proposed legislation or to sign such amendments. I still have concerns, however.

Clause 35(3) refers to animals or species only on the CITES list. CITES is clearly a recognised international forum that deserves a huge amount of respect and great weight must be placed on its findings. However, I say politely but with a certain degree of firmness to those on the Treasury Bench that we should not be restricted solely to species recognised by CITES. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith), who has led this debate in so many ways, alluded to the warthog. This seems an appropriate time to rest an argument on the wise words of Flanders and Swann, to whom one should always turn in moments of stress and anxiety. It is probably before your time, Madam Deputy Speaker, but you might remember the song, “The Warthog (The Hog Beneath the Skin)”:  

“The jungle was giving a party  
A post hibernation ball”—

I’m not going to sing it—

“The ballroom was crowded with waltzing gazelles, gorillas and zebras and all.  
But who is that animal almost in tears  
 Pretending to powder her nose?”—

it is not my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart)—

“A poor little warthog who sits by herself  
In a pink satin dress with blue bows.  
Again she is nobody’s choice and she sings in a sad little voice:  
No one ever wants to court a warthog  
Though a warthog does her best.”

I do not want to see us almost in tears as a result of a drafting error that restricts ourselves only to CITES. It may be that CITES does not respond to what I regrettably predict will be a fall in the warthog population, if that is the only form of ivory still able to be traded legally because it cannot be covered by the requirements of clause 35. I therefore urge my hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to consider the small deletion of the word “only” in clause 35(3).

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park, I too am not a lawyer—a fact that I usually rejoice in—but I suggest that the deletion of clause 35(6)(b), “extant on the day on which this Act is passed”, brings into the compass of the Bill mammoth. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. What we should be trying to endeavour to encourage across the world, not just here as a legislature, is the decommoditisation of ivory. The fact that it comes from a species that is extinct is to my mind immaterial, because one is still saying that it is fine to trade in it. My anxiety is that a perverse response, totally counter-intuitive to that which the Bill hopes to achieve, could be that the provisions expedite elephant poaching, because if the argument is that it is fine to trade in an extinct species, there could well be an impetus to drive the elephant to extinction merely to legitimise the trade in its ivory products.

Graham P. Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman has invested a lot of thought into the decommoditisation of ivory, as though that would be the silver bullet. Does he think that it is the silver bullet or that other action is needed to combat ivory poaching?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. It would be a terrible fallacy if we as legislators fell into the trap of thinking that something will stop all because we make it illegal. The Bill sends a very clear signal and closes down an important market in the ivory trade. However, if the hon. Gentleman is pointing to the work that our troops can do through the Ministry of Defence, or the work that Department for International Development and other organs of the state can do to better educate, to help economies in the developing world to grow, to realise and maximise the value of safari-type tourism, and to help to train people and give them the skills to go out with confidence to combat those who seek to kill elephants and other species merely for their ivory, he is absolutely right and I agree with him entirely. The Bill of itself will not achieve our aim, but I am absolutely convinced that it will play an incredibly important part when viewed as part of the wider and more colourful mosaic of tools that we have at our disposal.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we have to address the demand particularly in countries that on the surface adhere to the rules but allow trading below that to carry on and in some cases encourage it?

Simon Hoare: The hon. Gentleman makes a strong point and he is absolutely right. From that position, notwithstanding the cited but not referenced legal advice that the shadow spokesman, the hon. Member for Workington, mentioned, I would argue that precisely because of the need to send a clear message to other countries who are either subject to or perceived to benefit from the ivory trade, the most important thing that we can do is have the legislation in a really advanced state to take to this important conference in the autumn as an example of best practice and what can be done in the legislative process.

New clause 2 is on the report of the international ivory market. This slightly segues into the point made by the hon. Member for—I am going to say Alyn and Deeside—

Mark Tami: That is right.

Simon Hoare: Well, there we are—my knowledge of north Wales Labour MPs is getting even better. This segues into the hon. Gentleman’s point. I would much prefer to see pressurised resources in DEFRA, the MOD and DFID, concentrated on deploying as much as we possibly can to arrest and frustrate the ivory trade and poaching, rather than the bureaucratic complexities that, in essence, underpin new clause 2 about having the report on the international ivory market. Apart from having a report to keep open a door or prop open a broken window, I am not entirely sure what the report of itself would do and what sits at the heart of the new clause.

Of course, I support the amendments proposed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley) rose—

Simon Hoare: With trepidation but a certain degree of honour, I give way to my hon. Friend the Minister.
David Rutley: As always, my hon. Friend is very assiduous. I wonder whether he noticed today that we have announced that we intend to consult on extending the ban to include other ivory species, and we will seek to start the consultation process and gather evidence as soon as practicable or on Royal Assent. Does he not believe that that shows our clear commitment to taking action in this very important area?

Simon Hoare: My hon. Friend has pointed to my effective oratorical default, which is that I never, ever write a speech. I scribble notes on bits of paper and then get terribly confused—sometimes it is a shame and sometimes it is a blessing. In concluding my remarks on new clause 1, I was going to say—again, this militates against the need for it—precisely the point that my hon. Friend made from the Dispatch Box. He and our right hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare)—the current Leader of the House, if I have a—person, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), our right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom)—the current Leader of the House, if I have got her constituency wrong—who did so much work when she was the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), because only due to circumstances beyond her control was she not able to bring to the point of delivery that which she had been involved in from the moment of conception. She should take enormous pride in the Bill, which she had been involved in from the moment of conception. She should take enormous pride in the Bill, which she had been involved in from the moment of conception.

My hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mrs Trevelyan) and I have an affection for the narwhal, which might even be described as an obsession. I think it is probably best to keep that to ourselves—we do not need to go into the whys and wherefores. However, not only have Ministers and the Secretary of State indicated the appetite to make full use of clause 35(4), but were there ever to be a change of Government—pray God there will be no such an interval that my hon. Friend and I may have hung up our boots—I rather get the impression that a Labour Government would also be as keen to exercise the scope of clause 35(4), so trying to put this in the Bill in a new clause is irrelevant.

In conclusion, I recognise the enthusiasm and determination that the DEFRA team have shown on this Bill. I also put on record my thanks for what I think is the unsung work of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom)—the current Leader of the House, if I have got her constituency wrong—who did so much work when she was the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I also thank the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), because only due to circumstances beyond her control was she not able to bring to the point of delivery that which she had been involved in from the moment of conception. She should take enormous pride in the Bill, because it is something that is important for the House to do. Although there was some disagreement about pace and tempo during the Bill Committee and on Second Reading, the unanimity of view does credit to this place. Too often, it is seen through the rather narrow microcosm of Prime Minister’s questions, but when this place gets it, when it understands the need to do something, there is, I suggest, no finer example of the practice of politics. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to play a part, albeit a very small one, in bringing the Bill to this stage.

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate everybody who has helped to get this important Bill to this point, including the many campaigners and organisations who have pushed for it over the years, and I thank the civil servants and the Clerks who have worked so hard and all those who gave their time to give evidence to the Bill Committee. It was a pleasure to be part of that Committee, and I echo the words of the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare): it was Parliament at its best, working constructively and collaboratively across party lines to ensure that this groundbreaking Bill was as good as it could be.

The Bill matters deeply because the illegal wildlife trade has grown rapidly in recent years. It is now estimated to be the fourth-largest international illegal trade and worth over £15 billion per year. The illegal wildlife trade drives corruption, undermines the rule of law, threatens sustainability in developing countries and has been linked to other forms of organised crime, such as arms, drugs and human trafficking. The number of elephants in the wild has declined by almost a third in the last decade, and around 20,000 a year are still being slaughtered owing to the global demand for ivory—an average of around 55 a day.

3.30 pm

There are now approximately 415,000 African elephants left. In the last decade, their numbers fell by about 111,000, mainly owing to poaching. While the UK is not one of the countries of most concern in terms of its contribution to the global illegal ivory trade, there is recent evidence that our legal ivory market is still being used to launder illegal ivory, and ivory is being shipped legally and illegally to Asian countries. TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network, surveyed the UK ivory market in 2016 and found that while ivory sales had declined since 2004, the UK was still a net exporter of ivory. There was also some discrepancy in the numbers: the UK reported that only 17 raw tusks were exported to other countries, but importing countries reported 109 tusks that had come from the UK. UK ivory traders were also unclear on the laws around the legal ivory trade. The Bill is therefore vital and long overdue, and I am delighted to have been a member of the Committee and to be speaking on it today.

I want to focus my comments on two areas that I do not believe have been suitably progressed during the passage of the Bill. First, I will speak to new clause 1, in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), and the issue of widening the scope of “ivory” to cover species besides elephants. I recognise the amendment the Secretary of State has brought forward, about which we will no doubt hear more, and which will allow the scope of the Bill to be widened in the future, but I cannot help feeling we have missed an historic opportunity to do so here and now.

As I mentioned in Committee, there is a phrase used by medical students: “First, do no harm.” It is something that we ought to abide by in this place when passing legislation. I have a real concern, backed up by evidence, that by limiting the Bill to elephant ivory, we may have a disproportionate impact on another species, as poachers and dealers look elsewhere to feed their markets. Just as I did in Committee, I wish to speak, in particular, about the noble hippopotamus—known, of course, as the river horse—and to support my hon. Friend’s comments about the hippo.

The number of hippos in the world has crashed by 95% in the last 30 years—that is inconceivable—and that is widely acknowledged to be a knock-on effect of the increasing restrictions on the trade in elephant ivory.
ivory. Since the convention on international trade in endangered species imposed the ban in 1990, 30,000 tonnes of hippo teeth have been exported from Africa. For example, a few years ago, in the Virunga national park in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there were 29,000 hippos, but now there are just 1,300. The hippo is vulnerable and on the red list of threatened species, and there is deep concern that it is being poached and hunted for its teeth as loopholes are closed around elephant ivory.

In 2014, some 60 tonnes of hippo teeth were exported to Hong Kong from Africa and from there were sent on to European countries. If the purpose of the Bill is to close markets that are driving the trade, and given that there is clearly a strong integrated global trade in hippo teeth that has a huge effect on the species, it is vital that we take this opportunity to send out the message that we in this country do not believe that hippos should be killed or poached for their teeth and ensure that we do not, through the Bill, have a damaging impact on the hippopotamus.

I accept that the Government have tabled amendment 3 to allow them to widen the scope in the future, but I have not heard any arguments either in Committee or today that have convinced me that we cannot broaden the scope now. On the point about the conference in the autumn, if the Government were to accept our new clause today, or in the Lords, we would still hit that timetable—there would be no delay in the process. My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made very powerfully in Committee, when she said that we should look at this through the prism not just of protecting endangered species but of our moral obligation. We ought to be looking at this not, through the Bill, have a damaging impact on the hippopotamus.

I welcome the fact that the Government amendment does not limit the animals that may be covered in the future simply to those registered as protected in CITES. I believe that they were won over by the excellent representations that my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol East (Kerry McCarthy) made very powerfully in Committee, when she said that we should look at this through the prism not just of protecting endangered species but of our moral obligation. We ought to be driving out poaching and the hunting of animals for the use of their body parts because it is morally reprehensible, whether the animals are endangered or not. I am grateful that the Government have taken that on board.

**Zac Goldsmith:** I am taking a leap here, but I do not think that any Conservative will have disagreed with anything that the hon. Lady has said. It seems to me that the only real difference between the Opposition and the Government—and this is a question, not a statement—is a matter of process. The aspirations are almost identical. The Government’s commitment is to go further than new clause 1 by going beyond the CITES species, but on that there is no disagreement between the two parties. The only issue, really, is whether the Opposition are willing to trust the Government to honour the pledge that we have just heard from the Minister, but that is it. This is not about the issue; it is a matter of trust and process. Does the hon. Lady agree with that?

**Anna Turley:** Absolutely. I think the principle of trust is important, and I hope we would support the Government on that, but for me this is about timing. The issue is not whether it will happen, but the fact that it could be six months or a year before the Bill is passed. In the meantime, especially if the Bill proceeds successfully and is widely heralded, there will be a great deal of awareness about the crackdown on the ivory trade in this country. What concerns me is the knock-on effect in the next six months to a year on the trade in hippo teeth, which could be a direct consequence of the Bill. I therefore do not want any delay caused by the wait for secondary legislation. In principle, however, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we are going in the same direction.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for her references to my contribution in Committee. Let me also express my admiration for her elephant-patterned dress.

On the question whether another Bill will be introduced, is it not the case that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which does not normally handle an awful lot of legislation, has so much on its plate at the moment, what with the agriculture Bill, the fisheries Bill and so many other strategies—the need to consider agriculture subsidies, for instance—that the chances are that this will get pushed to the bottom of the pile if it is not dealt with soon?

**Anna Turley:** My hon. Friend has made an extremely important point, and one that is close to my heart. My private Member’s Bill to increase the punishment for animal cruelty was published in December, but we are still waiting for it to come before this place. There is a huge backlog in legislation, and I think it is dangerous to wait.

**Zac Goldsmith:** I apologise for intervening again, but may I take up that last point? Subject to consultation—and it is inconceivable that those consulted would oppose the proposals; we have to assume that they would pass the test of public opinion—these changes could be introduced very quickly and easily by means of a statutory instrument. This does not require primary legislation; it would be a very simple procedure, and the measure would go through unopposed.

**Anna Turley:** I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, but, conversely, I do not understand what his problem is with our new clause. We want to make the change here and now, and I have heard no sustained or reasonable explanation of why we need to delay.

**Zac Goldsmith:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Anna Turley:** I will take one more intervention, but then I must make some progress.

**Zac Goldsmith:** I will not support the new clause because I think that the Government’s commitment goes further, and, fundamentally, I have no reason to disbelieve the promise that the Minister has just made.
The Government will consult on extending the ban, and I have no doubt that the British people will respond to that consultation properly and positively. The statutory instrument will then be introduced. There is no reason for any Conservative Member to question what I think has been an impeccable track record on the part of DEFRA over the last year.

Anna Turley: The hon. Gentleman is right—the principle of the Government’s amendment, which broadens the CITES endangered species definition, is important and we support it—but I do not understand why he cannot support both. They are not mutually exclusive. We would really like to press on with this today, and there does not seem to be any reason for hesitation—other than work and effort, I am afraid.

Finally, let me say something about resources. In Committee, I was shocked by the lack of resources to back up the Bill. The Border Force CITES team at Heathrow has only 10 members of staff, although it is currently dealing with more than 1,000 seizures a year. The police National Wildlife Crime Unit has only 12 members of staff, despite dealing with all forms of wildlife crime from deer poaching to thefts of birds’ eggs, and no funding has been allocated to it beyond 2020. I think it reckless and irresponsible for the Secretary of State to introduce the Bill without having secured or committed resources to ensure that it can be properly enforced. There is a danger that this important Bill will be rendered hollow and unenforceable, and I hope that the Government are working to address that and give us some funding commitments.

Sir Hugo Swire: The hon. Lady has, of course, omitted the very serious commitment, in terms of personnel and funding, that we give through the British Army and anti-poacher training, in Africa and elsewhere. She must concede that.

Anna Turley: Absolutely, but that is a separate issue. I am talking about enforcement in this country. Thousands of cases a year pass through Heathrow, and the police must investigate every single item that is found in a suitcase. As we heard in Committee, there must be months and months of investigation of very complex cases of a cross-border and international nature, and that requires proper resources.

I hope that the Government have listened wholeheartedly to our recommendations, but I welcome the Bill. We have worked on it collaboratively and in strong partnership, and I think that there is little in it with which any Member can disagree. It is a landmark Bill, and I hope that it will have a significant impact on not only the elephant population, but many other species.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): I congratulate the Minister, the Secretary of State and the Opposition and everyone who worked so hard in Committee to get the Bill this far. We are all under time pressure, as the shadow Minister said; it is vital that this ban is in law by the time we have the conference, so that we can regain the leadership we had on this huge international issue.

I listened carefully to the shadow Minister’s speech, and I am in complete agreement with the intention. In fact, I mentioned the advice we got from the Born Free Foundation when I spoke on Second Reading, pointing out, importantly, the reduction in numbers. The hon. Lady cited the numbers; I have seen the figure of a reduction in hippo numbers of 25%, and she is absolutely right about what would happen if we only limit one type of ivory. Hippos spend a very happy life stationary; they are sitting targets in large pools of water. They have a very nice lazy time, but they would suffer terribly. That is just one species that would be hit, as I have mentioned.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park ( Zac Goldsmith) has been vocal in his interventions so far and I congratulate him on all the work he has done in recent years. On the same day as Second Reading, we wrote a joint letter to the Secretary of State, with a number of other Members, pointing out that the definition of ivory in the Bill as it stands is simply too narrow. Clause 35(1) says that “‘ivory’ means ivory from the tusk or tooth of an elephant.”

We pointed out in our letter that we were worried about other species such as hippopotamus, narwhal, killer whale, sperm whale and walrus as well as extinct species such as mammoth, which are being literally mined in Siberia by unscrupulous dealers. We also recommended, in very much the same sentiments as the hon. Lady has expressed, that we should name these ivory species, and possibly list them on—this was my phrase—the face of the Bill. So we wrote to the Secretary of State, and I am delighted that DEFRA has looked at this. I think that is what the hon. Lady is trying to achieve with her new clause 1.

I am not particularly fussed which of the mechanisms is used, either my idea of this being on the face of the Bill—for which we have not actually tabled an amendment—or the hon. Lady’s new clause 1, the downside of which is that it states: “Within 12 months of the coming into force…the Secretary of State must lay a draft of an instrument”.

What we heard from the Minister just now is interesting, and I think we will hear from him again shortly. Apparently, it is on the DEFRA website that what is now being proposed is that the consultation could begin immediately we get Royal Assent—it could even be on the same day. What I like about the new Government amendment 3 is that it goes much wider: we are not limited to CITES or a shortlist of species, which is what I was going to propose. Amendment 3 is better, as it is a much wider definition, and, as I understand it, it could go through faster. I have told this House on many occasions over the last 21 years that I am not a lawyer, but, as I understand it, without a formal consultation, this legislation could be prey to a legal challenge, whereas a statutory instrument, properly constituted, and after consultation and going through the human rights requirements, could probably be got through in about 12 weeks if it was pushed through. Therefore, it seems to me that we are all trying to achieve exactly the same aim, which is to seek to protect a number of other species that are not mentioned at the moment. Clause 35(1) is very narrowly drawn and is purely about elephants, and living elephants.

I am impressed by the arguments, therefore, and I hope we are going to hear from the Minister on this. He has had a go at me informally, and I appreciate his ringing me at home about this last weekend. I hope we will hear from him that the DEFRA lawyers have gone through this in some detail and that under his arrangement
we will scotch any chance of a legal challenge as it will go through the human rights requirements and the consultation will be absolutely clean. What is good and clever about it is that it is so wide that it encompasses the dead animal, the mammoth, which is a big advantage.

So I will be strongly supporting the Government on this. As I said, I am in total agreement with the Opposition’s intentions. I think that what I and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park wrote is probably the least good proposal, and happily it has not been put down as an amendment.

3.45 pm

Kerry McCarthy: The right hon. Gentleman mentioned a whole list of animals that might be included, and we also had a full discussion about this in Committee. It was only when the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds spoke to me this week that I realised that one species that had not been mentioned was the helmeted hornbill. I had no idea that there was a market in red ivory from the hornbill. Has that species come up in any of his considerations, and does he think that it should be put forward for protection as well? It is protected under CITES.

Mr Paterson: I am being told via a sedentary intervention that that is not ivory. This is an interesting issue, but surely the good point about Government amendment 3 is that it is very widely drafted, so that a lot of species and a lot of animals could be included. I think that that is a good thing. What the Opposition new clause is proposing, and what we were originally proposing in our letter, is actually narrower and less effective.

I shall sit down now, because it will be much more interesting for the House to hear what the Minister has to say, but this information is on the DEFRA website, and if we could get a statutory instrument out and get started on consulting on the day of Royal Assent, that would be the most rapid method. I think we all agree that we want to give the widest possible protection to the widest number of species, and that seems to be the right route to take.

Zac Goldsmith: I want to thank and pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for having taken this issue from somewhere near the bottom of the agenda four years ago and catapulting it to the top at the first illegal wildlife trade conference in 2014. That was really seismic, and it moved the dial on this issue unlike anything that had gone before. Does he agree that the 2018 conference in October will be an opportunity to go further still, not just by demonstrating our own commitment but by getting other key countries—particularly Asian countries such as Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, as well as members of the European Union—to make the same commitment that we are making here in this House today? This needs to be a global challenge, not simply a British one.

Mr Paterson: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind comments. It would be invidious of me not to mention my two other Cabinet colleagues at the time. One is now the right hon. Lord Hague of Richmond, and when I came back from Lewa in Kenya, he was as sharp as a tack and immediately got the point of the problem. DEFRA and the Foreign Office worked extremely closely to put the conference together. I also want to give credit to my right hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Justine Greening), who was really helpful from the DFID point of view. She saw the necessity for long-term sustainable economic activity in these areas, where there is a real danger of the value of wildlife not being appreciated. The advantage that I saw in Lewa, which I touched on at Second Reading, is that having rangers and properly protected wildlife creates a virtuous circle by bringing stability to the cattle industry, where the locals have been poaching each other’s cattle for centuries.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park mentioned the conference, and he was right to say that it is vital to get the Bill through in time for that. I went to the FCO a couple of days ago, and I was delighted to see the preparations for the conference. More than 70 countries have been asked so far, which is marvellous. I think we had 42 countries at the previous one. It is really important to get across how much co-operation there is between all sorts of countries that we could not possibly expect to be co-operating so closely. When I was in Moscow, the Minister there stressed how well the programmes with the Chinese Government were going on protecting the snow leopards in the Amur mountains. We got co-operation across the board at the conference, which was a unique event, and I very much hope that this autumn’s conference here will have a similar boost and a similar impact. However, we can only go to it and look people in the eye if we have got this legislation through.

Sir Hugo Swire: I hope that I am not stating the obvious, but I just wondered whether my right hon. Friend agrees that a good place to start this best practice would be within the Commonwealth.

Mr Paterson: Absolutely. Commonwealth members made several helpful contributions at the conference, and they will be invited again. The Commonwealth is a good vehicle for this, because this is about stopping both supply and demand, mainly in Asian countries, and some of our Commonwealth colleagues could be helpful at both ends of the trade.

I really want to hear from the Minister, but, based on what he has told me informally and from what I have seen on the DEFRA website, I will be supporting amendment 3, because it will deliver the fastest route to our aim. I think it would also be sensible for the Opposition, having listened to the debate and been convinced by the arguments, to withdraw their amendments so that we can get on to Third Reading.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is a privilege to speak once again on the Bill, which the Scottish National party welcomes. We also welcome Government amendments 1 and 2 to clause 6, and Government amendments 3 and 4 to clause 35.

We are working towards implementing stringent measures to protect and conserve populations of elephants and other endangered species for future generations. The survival of the species is the most important thing and must be realised, so the Bill must be as strong as possible. I thank members of the Bill Committee who worked together so consensually towards the same aim: protecting ivory-bearing species and populations of
elephants. We have the same aims and aspirations; this debate has just been about how we reach the final outcome that we all desire. The general public are absolutely behind the Bill, and we must take our lead from their good common decency and sense. The consultation received 70,000 responses, so we must act decisively in their name.

The SNP also supports new clause 1, which would require the Secretary of State to introduce a statutory instrument within 12 months of the Bill becoming law to extend its scope to include hippos, killer whales, narwhals, sperm whales and walruses. Such action is integral to affirming the UK’s commitment to stopping the trade of all inhumanely obtained ivory.

We heard compelling evidence in Committee about the unscrupulous nature of ivory poachers. They will stop at nothing, leaving no ivory-bearing species safe. They trade in death. They undermine poor and vulnerable communities in developing parts of the world, moving from species to species to make their money. Protecting elephants is critical, but the SNP believes that the Bill does not go far enough due to the possible impact on other species and further knock-on effects. Those other species also require protection from the actions of unscrupulous individuals.

Reports indicate that hippo teeth, which are also ivory, are being auctioned in Tanzania and that demand for ivory also poses a threat to Malawi’s hippos. Hippo teeth represent a cheaper and easier option. According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature, demand for them increased after the 1989 ban on the international trade of elephant ivory. I recently read that a killer whale that was beached in Vancouver—near where some of my family live—had its teeth removed by unscrupulous ivory thieves. It was an 18-year-old killer whale called J32 that had been nicknamed “Rhapsody”. Such people will go to any lengths.

Turning to narwhals—the sea unicorns—Queen Elizabeth I spent £10,000 on a narwhal tusk, which is the equivalent of around £1.5 million today. The average price today is between £3,000 and £12,000, and narwhals are considered to be near-threatened. It is important that we support new clause 1 to ensure that poachers do not move from species to species.

The SNP also supports new clause 2, which would require the Secretary of State to lay a report before each House within 12 months of the Bill becoming law, detailing the state of international ivory markets and the steps taken by the Department for International Development to reduce demand for ivory. That is extremely importante, because we are in a race against time. We will need to know that the Bill is having the desired impact—and quickly—so that we can amend or adjust the processes in place to save the species we desire to save.

The race against time means we must work, via DFID, with the communities that are most affected. We must determine, through a whole-Government approach, to tackle this trade and to ensure that we do our utmost to protect populations. Jobs and livelihoods are integral to populations affected by poaching. There must be alternatives to poaching, because we heard in Committee that people living in poverty in such areas tend to be caught up in poaching activity just to feed their families. If they have no alternative, there will be little for them to do other than to try to continue poaching unabated.

Through DFID, we must look to ensure that we leave no one behind, and that we protect jobs and livelihoods as alternatives for these communities. We must also work with rangers and conservation agents, who have a direct impact on tourism, to ensure that there are opportunities for growth and development in the countries affected.

SNP Members want the strongest Bill possible. We want to work consensually with Members on both sides of the House. We want to ensure there is a whole-Government approach and, most of all, we want to ensure that we proceed in a timely manner. The utmost goal of this legislation is not a conference at the end, but the survival of a species.

It is important that we come together to ensure that this happens for our children and grandchildren. My children visited the elephants two years ago. They still speak today about their experience of seeing baby elephants wandering. We want to ensure that that can continue and that this magnificent species continues to wander across our savannahs.

The 2015 SNP manifesto included a commitment to support further animal welfare measures with a global focus, including action to end the illegal ivory trade, so I commend new clauses 1 and 2 and the Government amendments to the House, to achieve the most stringent legislation possible.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. Just for guidance, may I say that if colleagues can stick to about seven minutes each, we will get everyone in? The Minister has yet to speak.

Mr Ranil Jayawardena (North East Hampshire) (Con): I am pleased that the Bill has made progress in Committee, building on the Government’s proactive work. As I have said before, I am pleased not only because of my interest in this area—that was why I founded the all-party group on endangered species with Members on both sides of the House—but because, like Opposition Members, many Conservative Members were elected on a manifesto promise to tackle the international wildlife trade and to press for a total ban on ivory sales. That was in the first manifesto I stood on. It is a manifesto promise I intend to keep, and I wish to highlight the last point in that specific wording. While the Minister is to be commended for bringing forward this much-needed Bill, in an unrelentingly positive manner, to protect these strong, smart, gentle endangered animals from murder—that is what it is: some 20,000 elephants are murdered each year for their ivory—we must protect many, many more species.

4 pm

As I said on Second Reading, clause 35 is unnecessarily narrow. I can accept that the explicit exemptions, such as those on portrait miniatures or musical instruments, are necessary, fair and proportionate, but an over-narrow definition of ivory is not. This is not just a technical matter; it is a matter of principle. It is not just about ensuring that the Bill covers every type of ivory and is extended to another category of item. It cuts to the fundamental principle of the ban: protecting endangered species now. If all a poacher has to do to sell the ivory...
they have recently butchered from an elephant is to declare it as ivory from a hippopotamus or from a long-dead mammoth, that is simply not good enough. Members can be certain that those profiting from the illegal wildlife trade will know the loopholes inside out. Worse, as the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) set out, such an approach may lead to poachers targeting those other species—hippos, walruses, narwhals and others—perfectly legally so that they can then sell that ivory under this Bill, as it stands. In effect, poachers would target those species by default for extinction. I am sure none of those outcomes is the desired intention, which is why I am pleased that the Government seem to be moving in the right direction.

I do not raise these points to criticise Her Majesty’s Government. Quite the contrary: I absolutely commend the Minister for his commitment to action on this, and I believe he will seize the opportunity to do the right thing, particularly as Government amendments 3 and 4 suggest that the Government are listening and want to expand the Bill’s scope through secondary legislation. That is why I will support the Government’s amendments, if anyone was to oppose them—I am encouraged to hear that they seem to have universal support across the Chamber—but I have concerns about the shadow Minister’s new clause 1, given its unnecessarily narrow focus on CITES and the species with us today. The measure could result in those who wish to do these animals harm using the loophole of simply saying, “That is mammoth ivory.” I am sure that that is not the shadow Minister’s intention, however, and I welcome her support for Government amendments 3 and 4, as they are the way of delivering the change we want.

I encourage the Minister to bring forward the consultation as soon as possible after Royal Assent, as he has indicated already. I encourage him to make that consultation as wide as possible and to include as many species as the Government need to be aware of. I hope that the Government will then act as swiftly as possible to bring secondary legislation to this place at the appropriate time.

Graham P. Jones: I want to speak to new clause 2, although on new clause 1, and given the speech we just heard from the hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena), I must say that I entirely agree that we should broaden the species to which the Bill applies, because it is about saving our wildlife, planet and ecosystem. None of those things operates in isolation. Our ecosystem is holistic and we must protect it as one. I would therefore hope that any changes made by new clause 1 would make the provisions as broad as possible.

I am delighted that the Leader of the Opposition and our shadow Front-Bench spokesperson have tabled new clause 2. I know that it has been brought forward with the notion of trying to gain cross-party support, however, because I do not think it goes far enough at all.

A year ago, when I had the fortune to meet Angolan MPs, I raised this issue with them. It is a case in point that while legislation to ban ivory was passed in 2016, those MPs had no idea that they had passed the legislation. When legislators do not know that they have passed legislation, we know we are starting off with a bit of a problem.

In 2018, poaching in Angola is as virulent as it was prior to the legislation. The rate of poaching has simply continued. Action has been taken and poachers have been prosecuted in cases involving considerable amounts of ivory, but by the time they are caught, the elephant is unfortunately dead. The elephant population is, of course, declining. Figures from National Geographic suggest that before the civil war, in around 1975, there were 200,000 elephants in Angola, but there may be just 2,000 left. According to more accurate figures from the general elephant census, which was conducted in partnership with Elephants Without Borders, there were some 70,000 elephants in southern Angola before the war but there are now around 3,400. That is a colossal cull of this wonderful animal over 40 years. I stress that the issue affects many animals, but in the short time I have, I wish to concentrate on elephants.

According to Elephants Without Borders, in 2015, for every 10 live elephants that the census recorded, it found four carcasses. That is incredible. Fifty-five elephants are being killed every day and the population is down by 111,000 in the past decade. The way in which they are killed paints a picture of what this cruel industry is about, how it operates and how poachers act with impunity. They use AK47s, and it requires many AK47 rounds to bring an animal down. We have all seen the horrific pictures of elephants that have not been killed, but are alive and suffering while their horns are hacked off. It is truly appalling.

The great elephant census did not just cover Angola. Between 2009 and 2016—just seven years—Tanzania has seen an elephant population decline of 60%, almost all of which is due to poaching. In the same seven-year period, Mozambique has seen a 48% fall in its elephant population. The National Academy of Sciences has said that 100,000 elephants were killed between 2010 and 2012. These statistics paint a picture of incredible carnage and an incredible reduction in elephant numbers. I, for one, am sad. We must take firmer action.

Elephants Without Borders has suggested that not only legislation is required. We must take protective action. The two must go hand in hand, but the legislation must be tough, and new clause 2 does not go far enough. We must do more. I welcome the fact that DFID staff are out in Kenya, providing some support for the protection of elephants. Perhaps that is the beginning of a future in which we protect the animals on this planet, along with the biology of the environment that we need to sustain the planet from which we draw life.

We need legislation, but we also need active protection. Legislating in this place simply does not go far enough; it is time for international laws and international action. It is time for the United Nations to step up and begin to put in place a framework that protects our planet and these animals. It is time that we not only pass legislation, but take direct action on protected areas. Instead of just providing armed forces for humanitarian purposes, it is about time that we and the United Nations provided forces for environmental purposes. The time has come for us, both as legislators and those active in the field, to take this issue seriously.

I finish by congratulating the British Army on what it is doing out in Kenya, but we need more of it. I support new clause 2 as a beginning, but it is the beginning of a long road, because a lot more needs to be done.

Kwasi Kwarteng (Spelthorne) (Con): This is a very important debate. In listening to speeches from across the House, I was struck by the fact that I had never seen
the House so united in terms of the purpose and seriousness of this legislation. The real differences—if there are differences—are about the manner of dealing with this and how we get the best results. That is very encouraging.

If one were to look at the number of elephants, one would be truly horrified. There were something like 1.2 million in 1980. Today, from the figures that I saw, there are a little over 400,000. Over 38 years, we have seen a two-thirds reduction in the number of wild elephants, so the species is undoubtedly in danger.

As a consequence, one can see why the Government have come up with this legislation. Initially, it was a very narrowly focused Bill, essentially designed to stop the trade in ivory with respect to elephants and the killing of elephants by poachers. One can understand exactly what the narrow scope of this legislation was. It was right for the people who have been campaigning on this issue to suggest that the narrow focus on elephants should be widened. Obviously, ivory comes from a range of sources. People have talked about mammoths and the teeth of hippopotamuses. It was inevitable that the legislation as drafted would be perhaps attacked or scrutinised on the basis that the focus was too narrow. I fully understand that.

What has happened in the past couple of days is that the Front-Bench team has listened to the debates and to the various representations. I saw on Twitter—I do not use Twitter very much, by the way—that the Environment Secretary has suggested that the next phase should be a much wider consultation than that proposed in new clause 1 by Opposition Front Benchers. That must be the right approach because, under the new clause, as Members have mentioned, mammoths are not included. We know that the way people claim that bits of ivory come from mammoths hides a multitude of sins and a great deal of criminality. That is another issue that is often overlooked in this debate—it has been mentioned once or twice.

The communities in which elephant poaching takes place, and the people who are driving this trade, are often linked with organised crime and with other very unsavoury elements in the countries of Africa in which the elephant and ivory are found. This has been going on for decades. One need only read accounts from Stanley in the 19th century to see how poachers—mass murderers, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Jayawardena) suggested—have been perpetrating these crimes for decades. It has to stop.

The reason that this is an interesting and important piece of legislation is that it marks, I think, the first time, or one of the first times, that a western country—or certainly an advanced economic country—has taken this issue very seriously.

As we go forward, after the international conference at the beginning of October, we will have to be even more focused and even more rigorous in our approach to the ivory trade. As people have observed, just banning the ivory trade with respect to the elephant will not be good enough. We have to take a holistic approach. We cannot simply say that ivory from the elephant should be banned and not legislate for other animals and other sources of ivory. The broader approach is obviously the best one, but legislation is difficult in any broad approach. We have to get the right terms and the right drafting. I am not sure that new clause 1 is necessarily the best way of trying to address this problem, which is why I will vote against it if it is pressed to a Division. I think that Government amendments 3 and 4 are a bit broader and more flexible. As we have discovered today, there have been later announcements suggesting that a broader approach—even broader than that proposed in new clause 1—is for the best.

It is a real credit to this House that something as sensitive as this Bill has brought forward a wide, courteous and informed debate. It is a real honour to be able to participate in the passage of this legislation.

4.15 pm

Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): It is a great privilege to speak in this debate, which is of so much interest to many of our constituents, right across the UK. I would like to talk about four things. I will speak in support of new clauses 1 and 2, but first I will refer to a couple of other issues that we discussed at some length in Committee.

It would be helpful to hear the Minister’s response regarding those issues, but they will not be fresh ones to him; this is well-trodden ground.

The first issue is that of cyber-security. This is an important matter, as has been acknowledged. Much illegal trading is done over the internet. In Committee, we discussed the need for proper measures to deal with that and heard about the difficulties in tracing that. Does the Minister have anything to say on that? If we are to make this legislation effective, it is important that we deal with the issue of cyber-security and cyber-trade.

The second issue is that of enforcement, which we also discussed in Committee. When taking evidence, we heard from Inspector Lou Hubble—head of the UK National Wildlife Crime Unit—who spoke particularly about cyber-security. She saw the need for additional resources to deal with the cyber-trade in ivory. Goods that are often presented not as ivory, but as bovine bone or other sources are really difficult to track down. I wonder whether the Minister has anything to say about that.

Let me turn to new clause 1. It seems that we all agree that we need to extend the legislation to include other sources of ivory. We are all concerned that, if we ban elephant ivory and strengthen the measures against that, we may displace the trade and find that other species are affected. That is why I am keen, as are other colleagues, that we broaden the description of ivory in the Bill. I heard the Minister saying that an announcement had been made on this, and it is good to see that there is change and movement in this area—we all agree that that is important—but I still support new clause 1. Will the Government consider going that bit further and supporting the new clause?

Sir Hugo Swire: The hon. Lady talks about going a bit further. Surely the whole point is that what the Government are proposing goes further than the Opposition’s new clause.

Liz Twist: We are keen to see that action is taken now and not deferred. From our perspective, new clause 1 would improve and strengthen the Bill.

New clause 2, which is also in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), calls for a report on the ivory trade in 12 months’ time.
[Liz Twist]

It is important that we have a mechanism for reviewing how the Bill is operating in practice within a period of a year, so that we can ensure that it is doing what we want it to do: reduce the slaughter of endangered species and other species covered by the Bill. It is also important that we ensure we can take steps to strengthen the legislation in the future if that is necessary, so I support new clause 2.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): We have had an important discussion of this Bill over the past few weeks. It has been a great honour to speak on something that is so important to so many of my constituents. It has also been very good to see how the House works very constructively together on occasions where there are particularly important and historic matters for us to discuss, as in this case. I am very grateful to the Government for listening so constructively to many of the points that I have made, on behalf of my constituents and some on my own reading of the Bill, and for answering a great many of them. I will address those in the course of my brief comments.

I do not support new clause 1 because I think the Government have proposed a better way of doing this. I say that for two reasons. They have been covered already but bear repeating. The first is the fact that the Government amendment goes further. New clause 1 deals only with CITES-listed species. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist) rightly raised a concern that we all have—I raised it on Second Reading—about species displacement, for want of a better phrase. The new clause, if anything, makes that more likely because it does not cover species that are not on the CITES list, such as the warthog. We need to ensure that we can go further. There is much more freedom in the Government’s approach, which is to add species whether they are endangered or not and whether they are extant or extinct. Their amendment will also cover the mammoth, which, as we have heard, is being mined, and closes a loophole whereby mammoth ivory can be passed off as elephant ivory. It is a much better way of doing this because it goes further.

Secondly, the Government’s amendment goes faster because we can deal with the matter by secondary legislation. I entirely understand what the Opposition are trying to do through new clause 1, but the big, overriding problem is the procedural one. If a challenge is raised to the primary legislation on the human rights ground, we may run into difficulty on the whole Act, and that would be a great shame. I have thought very hard about this. As a lawyer, I am naturally of the mind that I do not like legislation that is rushed through, because rushed laws are often bad laws. I would instinctively prefer that we took more time and got it right. In this case, however, there is very much a need to move quickly, given that the conference is coming up, and given all the heartbreaking stories that we have heard today and throughout the Bill’s passage, including during the evidence session.

It is very important that we make it clear that the ivory trade is no longer acceptable. It is also very important that we make it clear that Britain is a world leader on this. We have heard about the great work that is being done by the Army—I pay tribute to that—and through DFID. We can look at doing a lot more to expand that work. I very much welcome that.

For those reasons, we need to get this Bill on to the statute book as soon as possible, despite the fact that that goes against my natural instinct whereby I prefer to slow things down and take more time to make sure that there is not a hiccup further along the line. I am sensitive to the concern about everything being pushed into the long grass and the further expansion never happening, but I am very encouraged by today’s announcement by the Secretary of State that he will now be consulting on this. It seems to me that the Government have approached this in entirely the right way.

I have had a number of concerns about the Bill as it has gone through. Constituents have raised concerns with regard to the antique trade and those have been answered. I am grateful to the Minister for doing so, in full, and at relatively short notice. I had some concerns about the definitions aspect of clause 35. The Government’s amendments deal with those concerns because they mean that we do not have to worry about a particular species once the secondary legislation has been brought in to expand the species list further.

We can now move forward quickly with legislation that sets a positive, leading path for Britain as a nation. I wholeheartedly welcome that. I thank the Government very much for listening to all of us who have expressed concerns and for answering those concerns. I very much welcome the Bill and the Government’s amendments to it.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I spent three days on the Public Bill Committee carrying out detailed scrutiny. Although we did not always agree on the detail, I valued all the contributions from Committee members, who clearly believed strongly in eradicating the global ivory trade. We have a further opportunity today to make this a better Bill.

I want to start by raising a question that I asked the Minister in Committee, but which he might answer differently today. We had a detailed discussion about musical instruments and the rule that if less than 20% of an antique musical instrument is ivory, it can be sold. We heard from the Musicians Union that many retired musicians sell their instrument collection because it is not an industry in which people have a pension. I raised the issue of guitar picks made from mammoth ivory. The Minister quite rightly pointed out that they would be exempt because they are made from mammoth ivory. However, with amendment 3, there is a potential for mammoth ivory to be covered by the Bill. That changes the status of those guitar picks. I wonder whether the Minister will give a new response to that question today.

However, that is not the substantive part of my speech. I am in favour of the new clauses tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn), and in particular new clause 1. I will restrict my comments to the new clauses that relate to protected animals, and in particular the monodon monoceros, more commonly known as the narwhal, as I did in Committee. I do not have time to go into depth on the hippo, killer whale, sperm whale, walrus or warthog.

After returning home from the Committee, on which I served for three days, I was asked at the dinner table by my children what I had done that week in Parliament,
and I said, “Have you heard of the narwhal?” My 10-year-old son immediately broke into song. Following the example of the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), I will allow Members to hear the narwhal song:

“Narwhals, narwhals, swimming in the ocean
Causing a commotion coz they are so awesome”.

It goes on:

“Like an underwater unicorn
They’ve got a kick-ass facial horn
They’re the Jedi of the sea.”

Who could disagree with that?

If Members were not aware of the narwhal, I am sure they are now fully clued up and join every 10-year-old in the land who has impeccable knowledge of the narwhal. That knowledge is not new, however. Narwhals were known as sea unicorns for many centuries before exploration of the Arctic, and their tusks were one of the most valuable commodities in pre-industrial revolution Britain. Queen Elizabeth I is said to have spent £10,000—equivalent to £1.5 million today—on a narwhal tusk, which was placed with the Crown jewels.

Although narwhal horns are no longer so valuable, they are valued at between £3,000 and £12,000, and a double tusk can fetch as much as £25,000. The International Union for Conservation of Nature considers narwhal hunting still to be a major issue. In Canada and Greenland, narwhal hunting is still permitted, and between 2007 and 2011 an average of 979 narwhals were hunted a year. The Inuit as a native tribe have hunted narwhal for centuries, using them as a source of both food and income. In addition to the global trade in tusks and teeth, a Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society study found that shops in Japan were selling ground narwhal tusk as a tonic to treat fever. Shop counter prices for that medicine varied from $540 to $929 for 100 grams. Numerous reports have been produced, and there is an evidence base from non-governmental organisations.

CITES, which we have heard much about today, says that the main threats to the narwhal are hunting and climate change. The majority of narwhals live in and around Greenland’s territorial waters. Export of narwhal products was banned in Greenland in 2006, but narwhal products are legally traded within Greenland. Only subsistence hunting should take place. CITES says that there is a significant trade in narwhal tusks and parts, but not sufficient data to track it. The Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society is concerned that the hunting of narwhal has already become unsustainable. Narwhals have been over-harvested in Canada and Greenland. The society said:

“The annual hunting in western Greenland...significantly exceeded the quotas recommended by those scientific bodies of regional and international organisations charged with narwhal management.”

Laws in Greenland are being broken. Surely we should align our laws with theirs.

I am not sure whether the Minister is aware that the Inuit people are permitted to sell narwhal derivatives, including the horn, within the European Union. On one Canadian website, I could have ordered a narwhal tusk from my desk here in Parliament for around $70 an inch that could be legally sent to the European Union. There are restrictions on what can be imported without permits and penalties for contravening import rules. I thank the Minister for his letter in which he outlined the restrictions on imports from Greenland, which I deem sufficient, but he does not mention Canada, where restrictions are not so tight. I want to repeat what I asked him in Committee: will he clarify his views on narwhal horn trade from Canada?

As I have said, narwhals are also affected by climate change. While I understand the need for haste with elephants, narwhals face more than one threat, so it is important to include narwhals in the scope of the Bill, rather than for this to be covered under clause 35. Why wait when action can be taken in the Bill today?

4.30 pm

Sir Hugo Swire: I will speak briefly because time is marching on, and I did not have the privilege of serving on what I believe must have been a fascinating Public Bill Committee. Coming to this quite new, I urge the Opposition to drop their proposal to push new clause 1, which I do not think the Government are supporting. I completely understand where they are coming from, and had the Government not come up with their latest proposal, I would in fact have supported new clause 1. However, I believe the Government’s proposal trumps what the Opposition are suggesting. It is unfortunate, when we are trying to send a unified message to those in the world who are watching these deliberations, that there is or is perceived to be some artificial division between us, when I do not think there really is one. I therefore urge the Opposition to look again at withdrawing new clause 1.

It is important to get the Bill through without the threat of judicial review or—I am not a lawyer—any other kind of legal challenge. We must aim for the wildlife conference in October, and it is absolutely critical that we enable the Bill to be passed before then. At the wildlife conference, which is designed to protect the elephant, I hope, as a former Minister for Asia, that we will cover Indian elephants, because we tend to concentrate more on Africa than elsewhere. I saw a programme the other day about what is happening to elephants because of logging; there is no use for them, and they are therefore abused, killed or whatever. I hope that the wildlife conference, rather than just discussing the issue of elephants being killed for their ivory, also looks more holistically at the role of an elephant in such communities and at how we can better support them.

As I say, I have come to this quite late, but I believe there are still outstanding issues. I am sure those issues will be addressed in tremendous detail in the other place, not least the subject of compensation for some collectors, the measures on antiquites and the proposals put forward by the antiquites trade, which I think need to be looked at again, as well as the charges to exemption certificates. I am sure such points have been well articulated in Committee, and I have absolutely no doubt that they will be looked at more closely again in the other place; the point of the other place is to look at such issues in great detail.

I believe the principle of what the Government are seeking with the Bill is absolutely right. It is one of those rare occasions when the House is unified on something that will have huge popularity well beyond the Chamber.

Mr Paterson: Am I right to say, as a summary of the position of those involved in the antiquites trade, that they find that the Bill is tough but fair and that they
would not like it tightened up any further? For speed, should we advise those in the other place not to spend too much time changing the Bill? Speed is of the essence in getting it through before the conference.

Sir Hugo Swire: Yes, I agree with my right hon. Friend. I would say that there are legitimate concerns that still need flushing out, but I do not think anything should be done that will prevent the passage of the Bill in time for the wildlife conference. There are genuine concerns about how tight the legislation is in some respects and about how people may be inadvertently affected. I believe that legislation is only as good as the thought that is given to it, and there is nothing worse than implementing bad legislation. The legislation has to stand the test of time, and I believe the Government are trying to achieve that. I am sure that any serious points raised in the other place will be addressed suitably, but my right hon. Friend is, as usual, absolutely right that we must do nothing to prevent the swift passage of what is, in most respects, an excellent Bill.

David Rutley: This has been another outstanding debate on a very important subject, and I am very grateful for all the contributions that have been made.

On Second Reading, I was heartened to hear the support from all parties for the Bill. I thank all the Committee members for their important contributions on this issue and for the suggestions on how we can refine the Bill. Progress has been swift, and it is crucial that we continue that pace of progress on the Bill, as has been set out in numerous speeches.

I would like to give a warm welcome back to the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey). As always, the Department will benefit from her keen intellect and boundless energy in moving forward with so many important initiatives, of which this Bill is not the least. It is good that she is in her place on the Front Bench today.

We have not really discussed the intention of Government amendments 1 and 2, which seek to provide a definition of a pre-1918 portrait miniature for the purpose of the exemption in clause 6. The amendments adds a size restriction to the definition so that portraits with a 320 sq cm surface area qualify for exemption. That is the maximum area of the visible surface of the ivory “canvas”, irrespective of the size of the frame. In Committee, Emma Rutherford, a representative of Philip Mould & Company, who is an expert on portrait miniatures gave evidence on how the exemption for portrait miniatures could be refined to add a size limit. The Government listened to that expert evidence and to views expressed in Committee and have introduced proposals that set maximum dimensions for portrait miniatures. We have discussed this, but we have chosen to exempt portrait miniatures because the value of these popular items is due not to their ivory content but to their historical importance, the delicate painting and their luminosity.

Let me now move on to important subjects that have been discussed at length today. We should focus our attention on Government amendments 3 and 4 and discuss matters raised in debate. I shall then come on to discuss new clause 1. As has been said, amendments 3 and 4 will extend the power to make secondary legislation so that the definition of ivory could include that from any ivory-bearing species.

The hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman), in a characteristically considered contribution, asked whether the focus on elephants was initially an oversight. Non-governmental organisations, particularly during the evidence session, underlined the need to focus on elephants as an urgent priority. There was no oversight—there was a clear focus to start with—but that is not to say that we should not move on and look at other species.

We have heard passionate speeches expressing concerns about other species, from the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) about hippos, and from the hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). I do not think anyone will forget the speech by the hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel), and his legendary narwhal song. We will have to find the words and start humming them in the bath, or something.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear on Second Reading, it is important that, as a result of this ban, the trade in ivory does not move to other species. That is why we included a power in clause 35(3) to allow other ivory-bearing species listed under CITES to be brought into the scope of the ban.

Robert Courts: May I repeat my thanks to the Minister for listening to the concerns that I have expressed about that provision in particular? Does he agree that the key point is that we need to move quickly to protect elephants, but after that we need maximum flexibility so that the Government can protect other species, whatever they are, as and when required?

David Rutley: My hon. Friend has been consistent throughout the process about the need to push forward, as have many colleagues on both sides of the House. Absolutely—we need pace, and I will come on to how we will ensure that we move forward as quickly as possible in the weeks and months ahead.

Sir Hugo Swire: When my hon. Friend begins to explain why the Government’s proposals are better than Opposition new clause 1, will he provide the House with evidence such as potential legal challenges or judicial review that has led the Government to decide that this is a better way to proceed?

David Rutley: Indeed I will. My right hon. Friend has made an important point. Of course, we want to move fast, but we want whatever legislation we introduce to be compliant. We want to make sure that it is effective and enforceable legislation, and I will come on to explain more about that.

We have listened carefully to the views put forward by expert witnesses in Committee and by Members on both sides of the House, and we have made it clear that we should not wait for ivory species to become endangered before we can take action. The amendments will therefore allow us to prohibit dealings in ivory from CITES species, as is currently the case under the existing drafting of clause 35 and, additionally, any other ivory-bearing animal or species, including those that are endangered—for example, warthogs, my favourite animal.
I would like to thank my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), of warthog fame, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham)—we will not forget her contributions in Committee on mammoths—for their determined commitment to these species. The Government are clear that we should work together for the Bill to move swiftly through Parliament and that we should not allow the Bill to be derailed. Quick passage is important as in October the Government are hosting the fourth conference on both sides of the House, at which we will bring together global leaders on this issue. The conference will build on previous efforts, address the underlying systemic issues that facilitate the illegal wildlife trade and demonstrate a step-change in the fight against this criminal trade. Our aim is to make significant progress with the Bill before the conference.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): It was a great privilege to serve on the Bill Committee. Britain’s global leadership on this issue is absolutely essential. Does the Minister agree that the strong message we are sending out by passing the Bill in a timely manner and widening the scope to other species will lead to change in countries across the world?

David Rutley: I thank my hon. Friend for his contribution in Committee. He makes an important point. We want to highlight our commitment to tackling illegal wildlife trade. The Bill, and the extension we are talking about today through the consultation, will be important in sending out a clear signal to other countries, and not least the EU as it looks at its own ban.

As referenced on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website, the Government are clear that introducing protections for other ivory-bearing species is important. That is why we anunciouned today our intention to consult on proposals to extend the ban to other ivory-bearing species on or as soon as practicable after Royal Assent.

Mr Jayawardena: I was not on the Bill Committee, but I have been following the Bill closely, as have other members of the all-party group on endangered species. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the consultation would allow the Government to move further and faster than would have been possible under new clause 1?

David Rutley: Absolutely. It is our intention to move further. We are all agreed on that. As I will set out, we believe categorically that this will be faster. I think that that is the sort of speed people want to see as we move forward in the weeks ahead.

Kwasi Kwarteng: Could my hon. Friend give the House any indication on timing for the consultation process?

David Rutley: As I said in the DEFRA announcement—I am pleased that my hon. Friend has given me the opportunity to underline this—the consultation would start on or as soon as practicable after Royal Assent. The commencement of the Bill will be around six months afterwards. Importantly, the consultation will take place at the point of or close to—as soon as practicable—Royal Assent. We will then move forward with the consultation and, assuming that the evidence shows that it is right to put forward the statutory instrument and include certain species that we have talked about, we can then move forward on a quicker timescale than has been set out—[Interruption.] From a sedentary position, I heard the hon. Member for Workington suggesting that we do it straightaway, which is a lovely thought and I understand her intention. However, the key thing that I am trying to stress is pace. Let us make sure that the Bill is compliant as well. I say gently to Opposition Members—I know that they are committed to pressing the new clause to a vote—that we want to make sure that the Bill is compliant, and given the focus and commitment that we have all given to the Bill, it is not right for there to be any risk, not just to the future of the delegated powers, but to the Bill as a whole by putting such provisions in it. That is what I ask Members to consider as we move to the vote.

We have already talked about new clause 1, but let me just add further weight to the arguments around it. It is clear that this new clause will place the Secretary of State under a duty to lay an instrument under the affirmative procedure within 12 months of clause 35 coming into force. It would extend the prohibition on dealing elephant ivory to ivory from CITES-listed species, so it does not go as far as the approach that the Government have set out.
[David Rutley]

As I said, the Government intend to consult on the extension of the ban and to conduct analysis of the impact that this may have on individuals and business. The new clause, however, presupposes or prejudges the outcome of that important work and would remove the opportunity for the public to provide evidence. It would oblige the Government to extend the prohibition to CITES species, even if the evidence does not support it. For some or all of the species listed in the new clause, that could mean that the regulations may not be compliant with the European convention on human rights and could be challenged on that basis. Given that explanation, I very much hope that in her concluding remarks the hon. Member for Workington will consider withdrawing her new clause.

During the debate, a number of other issues have been raised and I will turn briefly to some of them. The hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley) has made points about resources and cyber-security. I assure her that this is obviously a key area of focus and priority for the Government. The National Wildlife Crime Unit and Border Force do a fantastic job and we are committed to making sure that they have the resources to take this work forward. Of course, the Office for Product Safety and Standards, the regulator, will have additional resources, and working together with the enforcement agencies, will ensure that the ban is enforceable and is done so well.

The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) made the point about spectrums. If they are made of mammoth and assuming that the ban extends to mammoths, they would be prohibited, but clearly, they can still be used. They can be passed on and bequeathed; they just cannot be sold commercially. He makes an excellent point about narwhals. We have exchanged correspondence and we encourage other nations to take such commitments seriously. I will gladly meet him separately to talk about Canada.

The hon. Member for Workington talked about the need for a report. We talked about this in Committee at great length. I understand why she wants a report, but the Government do not believe it to be their job to produce one, because other organisations can do so more independently, and of course there would be a cost involved as well. I therefore ask her not to press her new clause 2. With that, I thank hon. Members for their contributions on Report.

Sue Hayman: We have had an excellent debate this afternoon, and it is great that hon. Members right across the House have welcomed and supported this important Bill. I thank the Minister for our constructive discussions in Committee and today and warmly welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), to her place.

I take issue with what some hon. Members have said about Government amendments 3 and 4 meaning that new clause 1 is not required. We believe that the amendments would amend subsections (2) and (3), so they are not mutually exclusive. If we are to make the Bill as strong as it can be today and achieve as much as we can, I see no reason why the House cannot support both new clause 1 and the Government amendments. We would then today have the strongest Bill possible. I am a little disappointed, therefore, that the Government do not want to support the new clause.

Robert Courts: A Bill that is open to challenge is not a strong Bill. Is that not the fundamental problem with the hon. Lady’s argument?

Sue Hayman: I will come to that point, but I am aware that I only have a minute and half left.

Having made those comments, I strongly welcome the Minister’s commitment to seek to start a consultation process on widening the scope of the ban to other species if the House does not support the new clause today. The Opposition have pushed strongly for this right from the beginning, and I welcome the fact that he has listened to us. On the issue the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts) raised, I talked about the consultation in Committee, and I must again draw Members’ attention to the fact that I am an associate of the Consultation Institute. I have taken further advice from the institute, and it has reiterated that the consultation could be carried out both swiftly and efficiently as a supplementary consultation without giving rise to any issues of legal challenge. It is happy to support the Government in achieving a very solid consultation. None of us in the House wants to see any legal challenges to the Bill. If the Minister would like me to put him in touch with the institute—if he thinks that would help—I would be more than happy to do so. With that, I ask the House to support new clause 1.

4.53 pm

Two hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings on the programme motion, the debate was interrupted (Programme Order, this day).

The Deputy Speaker put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair (Standing Order No. 83E), That the clause be read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 256, Noes 305.

Division No. 203

AYES

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniassi, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Austin, Ian
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Black, Mhairi
Blackford, rh Ian
Blackman, Kirsty
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brook, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Clwyd, rh Ann

[Column listing names of Members voting in the Ayes]

[Column listing names of Members voting in the Noes]
Tellers for the Ayes:

Nick Smith and Jeff Smith

NOES

Braverman, Suella
Breer, Jack
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alan
Cartidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clayton, Angela
Clevedon, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Constance, rh James
Cox, Geoffrey
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Cox, Mr John

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harnett
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Benyon, rh Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham

Smith, Laura
Smyth, Karin
Snell, Gareth
Sobel, Alex
Spellar, rh John
Starmer, rh Keir
Stephens, Chris
Stevens, Jo
Stone, Jamie
Streeting, Wes
Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, Mark
Thewliss, Alison
Thomas, Gareth
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thornberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turley, Anna
Twigg, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Umunna, Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
West, Catherine
Western, Matt
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitefield, Martin
Whitford, Dr Philippa
Williams, Dr Paul
Wilson, Phil
Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammed
Zeichner, Daniel
“(2) The report must as far as practicable analyse the impact of
“(1) Within 12 months of section 1 of this Act coming into

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL IVORY MARKET

“(1) Within 12 months of section 1 of this Act coming into

(2) The report must as far as practicable analyse the impact of

(3) The report must consider—

(a) the impact on nations or communities that generate

(i) the provisions of this Act, and

(ii) international agreements related to the ivory trade,
This new clause would require a report to be laid before each House of Parliament on the international ivory market, including how the Department for International Development is working to reduce global demand for ivory.

**Brought up.**

**Question put,** That the clause be added to the Bill.

**The House divided:** Ayes 262, Noes 306.

### Division No. 204

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Woodcock, John
Yasin, Mohammed
Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
Nick Smith and
Jeff Smith

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria
Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Sir Geoffrey
Cleverly, James
Clarke, Mr Simon
Clarke, Kenneth
Clark, Colin
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Andrew
Clarke, Sir Edward
Clarke, Sir Robert
Clayton, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Bрокер, Sir Robert
Brockenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartidge, James
Cash, rh Alun
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
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Clarke, Sir John
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Therese
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn

Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Harv, Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rl Nick
Hinds, rh Damien
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Hollingbery, George
Hollinsaeke, Kevin
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddelestar, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy
Hurd, rl Mr Nick
James, Margot
Javid, rl Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Sir Bernard
Jenkins, Andrea
Jennick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
Lancaster, rh Mark
Leadsom, rh Andrea
Lee, Dr Philip
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Letwin, rh Sir Oliver
Lewer, Andrew
Lewis, rh Dr Julian
Liddle-Drainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Little Pengelly, Emma
 Lopez, Julia
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Mr Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Mackinlay, Craig
Maclean, Rachel
Main, Mrs Anne
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, Kit
Mann, Scott
Masterton, Paul
Maynard, Paul
McLoughlin, rh Sir Patrick
McVe, rh Ms Esther
Menzies, Mark
Mercey, Johnny
Merriman, Huw
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, rh Mrs Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, rh Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, Damien
Mordaunt, rh Penny
Morgan, rh Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Morton, Wendy
Mundell, rh David
Murray, Mrs Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, rh Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O'Brien, Neil
Offord, Dr Matthew
Opperman, Guy
Parish, Neil
Pater, rl Priti
Paterson, rl Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, rh Sir Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, rh Claire
Philip, Chris
Pincher, Christopher
Polet, Dr Dan
Pow, Rebecca
Prentis, Victoria
Prisk, Mr Mark
Purvesglove, Tom
Quin, Jeremy
Quince, Will
Raab, Dominic
Redwood, rh John
Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Robinson, Mary
Rosindell, Andrew
Ross, Douglas
Rowley, Lee
Rudd, rh Amber
Rutley, David
Sandbach, Antoinette
Sculty, Paul
Seely, Mr Bob
Selous, Andrew
Shannon, Jim
Shapps, rh Grant
Sharma, Alok
Shelbrooke, Alec
Simpson, David
Simpson, rh Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, rh Julian
Smith, Royston
Soomes, rh Sir Nicholas
Spelman, rh Dame Caroline
Spencer, Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
itself.

for example anything larger than 20 cm by 16 cm will not qualify.

items that can qualify for exemption as portrait miniatures, so that covered by a frame.”—

a portrait miniature does not include any part consisting of or

See the explanatory statement for Amendment 2.

insert

5.26 pm

David Rutley: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

What a pleasure it is to move the Third Reading motion for this important Bill. It is a simple but vital piece of legislation with a clear purpose: to help save one of the world’s most magnificent animals, the elephant, from the brink of extinction at the hands of ruthless ivory poachers. The ban on the sale of elephant ivory items of all ages, with only limited exemptions, will be the strongest in Europe and among the strongest in the world. The introduction of the Bill has reaffirmed the UK’s global leadership on this critical issue, and reflects our commitment to making illegal trade in ivory a thing of the past. By seeking to ensure that ivory is never seen by the poachers as a commodity for financial gain or by potential customers as a status symbol, we will protect elephants for future generations.

The Bill has been improved today by amendments made on Report that took account of the evidence put forward by expert witnesses in Committee. This is my first time taking a Bill through the House as a Minister, and I am grateful for the positive way in which Members have engaged with it as it has progressed; I hope that that spirit will continue. We can all be rightly proud of the Bill. Let me take this opportunity to thank all the non-governmental organisations, the museums, the antiques sector and the enforcement bodies for their contributions and written evidence taken and received in Committee evidence sessions.

Clauses 6 PRE-1918 PORTRAIT MINIATURES
Amendments made: 1, page 5, line 4, after “miniature” insert
“with a surface area of no more than 320 cm”. See the explanatory statement for Amendment 2.
Amendment 2, page 5, line 5, at end insert—
“( ) For the purposes of subsection (1) (a) the ‘surface area’ of a portrait miniature does not include any part consisting of or covered by a frame.”—(David Rutley.)

Amendment 1 and this amendment impose a size restriction on the items that can qualify for exemption as portrait miniatures, so that for example anything larger than 20 cm by 16 cm will not qualify. The size restriction applies to the visible surface area of the picture itself.

Clause 35 MEANING OF “IVOY”
Amendments made: 3, page 21, line 1, at end insert
“so as to include ivory from an animal or species (whether extant or not) that is not for the time being covered by that subsection”. See the explanatory statement for Amendment 4.
Amendment 4, page 21, line 2, leave out subsection (3).—(David Rutley.)
The effect of Amendment 3 and this amendment is that regulations amending Clause 35(1) will be able to add ivory from any species of animal, including those that are not currently endangered and those that are extinct.

Third Reading
Queen’s consent signified.

5.26 pm

David Rutley: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

What a pleasure it is to move the Third Reading motion for this important Bill. It is a simple but vital piece of legislation with a clear purpose: to help save one of the world’s most magnificent animals, the elephant, from the brink of extinction at the hands of ruthless ivory poachers. The ban on the sale of elephant ivory items of all ages, with only limited exemptions, will be

Mrs Anne-Marie Trevelyan (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): The Minister mentioned museums. On Second Reading, I raised the question of Northumbrian pipes made since 1975 using CITES-approved ivory. I understand that in Committee, despite these pipes’ unique and beautiful nature, it proved impossible to give a specific exemption for pipes made since 1975, but will the Minister meet me to discuss how we might find a way to use the local community or to set up some sort of fund, so that these pipes, which are owned by families, will not be lost to the musical traditions of Northumberland and will find a repository that can be passed on to future generations?

David Rutley: That issue was also raised by the hon. Member for Blaydon (Liz Twist). My hon. Friend is a formidable local champion and I will of course meet her to discuss how the Government can look into ways to continue to keep that rich part of her community’s heritage very much alive.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I have not involved myself in the passage of this Bill, but I was intrigued by what consideration had been given to probate valuation. If someone is the owner of a Giambologna cup made of ivory, which is potentially worth millions, and which could have an exemption certificate granted to it, but they never apply for one and they die and they hand it over to a future generation, I assume that its value will be zero for that purpose.

David Rutley: Guidance will be given to help people understand the implications of this measure. We are making sure that the new regulator does their job formally to help the antique trade understand all the implications, and there will also be a public engagement exercise. My right hon. and learned Friend makes an important point, but I am sure that it will be further scrutinised in the other place as this Bill makes progress.

Let me return now to some remarks that I had previously wanted to get through, which is that we have had good debates on clause 35 both in Committee and on Report. The widening of the power to extend the definition of ivory to include that from non-CITES
species will be important, for example, if the prohibition in elephant ivory increases pressure on other ivory-bearing species and continues to fuel demand, or if the continued trade in other forms of ivory provides cover for the illegal trade of elephant ivory. This could well include ivory from the unfairly maligned warthog and the extinct mammoths. This will come as some relief to my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare), who is no longer in his place, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham). The widening of the power will also include other endangered species that Members have mentioned with such concern, including hippos, narwhals, walruses, killer whales and sperm whales. As I said on Report, the Government are committed to action.

We have today announced that we intend to consult on extending the ban to include other ivory species, and we will seek to start the consultation process and to gather evidence on, or as soon as practicable after, Royal Assent. This process will ensure that if we do extend the scope of the ban, it will be robust, defensible, enforceable, and compliant with the European convention on human rights.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will my hon. Friend explain to the House how long he expects the consultation to last and what the sequence of events would be that we might arrive at some new legislation to protect these endangered species?

David Rutley: We will seek to do this as speedily as possible. A consultation normally lasts about 12 weeks, but, clearly, that work needs to be further reviewed, and then we can move things forward. I think that my hon. Friend can use his own process of deduction to work out that we can move this further and quicker than would have been set out by the Opposition’s amendments.

Let me conclude by thanking once again and paying tribute to the Secretary of State for his determination to introduce this Bill. I have also mentioned the important work that the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) has done in taking this Bill forward, ahead of its introduction in this House. It is also important to recognise the contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) who set out his long-held ambitions to take this work forward. I also wish to extend my thanks to my colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and from my right hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr Paterson) who set out his long-held ambitions to take this work forward.

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We discussed an annual register of items exempted for having artistic, cultural or historical value. This was strongly supported by conservation groups during the Committee’s evidence hearing, and it would ensure public confidence in the ivory ban and that any exemptions applied were fair. Despite not supporting our amendment, the Minister provided an assurance in Committee that steps would be taken to ensure the utmost transparency and public confidence. In time, it would be interesting to have more detail on those assurances. We also asked for assurances regarding the potential abuse of replacement certificates, as the Bill currently includes no limit on those. Again, it would be interesting to hear from the Minister more about how any potential abuse could be eliminated.

The Committee heard that the National Wildlife Crime Unit has only 12 members of staff to cover its whole area of operations, right across the UK, and that this number includes administrative staff as well as enforcement officers. This level was a cause for concern
in Committee, given the expanded responsibilities of the unit under the Bill. The Minister mentioned the potential for this being dealt with in the autumn statement—I think that is actually the Budget now, but it moves so often—so we would be grateful if the Minister acknowledged that these concerns exist so that they can then be addressed at that point.

The Committee also heard how the internet plays a central role in the sale of ivory products. I would be grateful if the Minister outlined plans for proactively policing and monitoring this online activity and mentioned what kind of resources would be needed.

This Bill is a welcome step forward for the future of global elephant populations. I look forward to working with colleagues right across the House to ensure that we continue to do everything in our power to stamp out the global ivory trade and preserve these iconic animal species for generations to come.

**Mr Speaker:** A number of people still wish to speak, and we have 15 minutes remaining.

5.38 pm

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): I rise to speak in support of the Bill’s Third Reading. This is a day of celebration for all animals that have horns.

I detected a slight bit of grandstanding about who should take credit for this Bill—I understand all that. The hon. Member for Workington (Sue Hayman) shared with the House the details of the terrible attack on Bella the rhino, and I absolutely understood the point that she was making. For my part, I could not care less who gets credit for the Bill; I am just delighted that it is happening. I think that the credit goes to all the women and men who have not just come to the party now, but have been campaigning on this issue year in, year out. They are the ones who should be congratulated.

I know that I am speaking in the House at the moment, where we sit opposite one another, but may I congratulate my Government, particularly the Secretary of State, for at long last dealing with this issue and achieving something? The hon. Member for Workington tabled amendments to the Bill, but, having worked it out, I think that following the consultation we can deal with the whole process within a year, which is quicker than would be the case under the Opposition’s approach. Our Australian neighbours, who are not in the World Cup, are following our lead on this matter, and the Government’s plan to launch the Ivory Alliance 2024 will share our position further with other countries throughout the world. This is a great day for Parliament and a great day for the animal kingdom.

5.39 pm

**Dr Cameron:** This is a truly historic day. We have worked extremely hard in Committee and at the Bill’s other stages to bring the legislation to this point. I thank everybody who has been involved for working so well together. The Bill is historic because its purpose is to ensure that elephants and other at-risk ivory-bearing species survive and are effectively protected for generations to come. That is important for us, for our constituents right across the United Kingdom, and for future generations—our children and grandchildren, and beyond.

I am extremely proud to be able to speak today and commend the work that has taken place. I particularly thank the Minister for his careful consideration of these matters in Committee and today. He has worked very consensually. I also thank the shadow Minister for working very well. Across the House, we have all aimed to strengthen the Bill as much as possible to make sure that it has the maximum impact, because its impact is what is important and what we are aiming for. I would still like some assurances about funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit, because we must make sure that the legislation is enforceable in the UK, and about how colleagues in DFID will work with the communities that will be affected.

I pay tribute to the environmental and animal welfare agencies and groups that have been so involved in this for so long: the International Fund for Animal Welfare, Tusk, Stop Ivory and the Born Free Foundation, to mention just a few.

People think that we spend our time in the House debating the same issues repeatedly, going round and round in circles—often quite literally—but the very best work is undertaken in cross-party form with significant cross-party agreement. This Bill is a perfect example of Parliament acting consensually in the interests of all people. I am proud to have played a part and to represent the SNP on this historic matter.

5.42 pm

**Giles Watling** (Clacton) (Con): I would like to put on record how pleased I am that this Bill is going through the House today, and very speedily—I am grateful for that.

At a reception at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office the other day, I watched a very sad film about Sudan, the last male white rhino, who, very sadly, died in March. There are two females left, but it looks as though they are going to die out. I do not want to attend a reception where we mourn the loss of the last elephant, so we must do all we can to protect them.

It is crucial to elephants that this Bill ushers in a vital change to bring us into line with other developed economies around the world that have already introduced their own bans. For too long, we have been overshadowed by the USA, China, France and some of the other biggest global ivory trade markets, which have already introduced comprehensive bans. I am pleased that we will now be part of that positive movement, because we have been absent for far too long.

I am delighted that the Bill will introduce a total ban on the sale of ivory, including, most importantly, antique ivory, because the antique ivory market in the UK is surprisingly large. Some so-called antique ivory is faked—it is aged and stained to look antique. We cannot allow that to happen, and that is why I am delighted that this Bill will be passed.

What is more, we must push for a global ban. In the aftermath of the Chinese ban, Ginette Hemley, the senior vice-president of the World Wildlife Fund, said: “This ban won’t end the poaching of elephants. It’s equally critical that China’s neighbors follow suit and shut down ivory markets across Asia.”

So let us in the UK lead the way with this Bill, and let other European countries follow us. I am very pleased with the Bill and I support it.
Mr Jayawardena: It is rare that a Bill receives almost universal support, so it is terrific that it has been supported by Members on both sides of the House, despite a few amendments.

In the interests of time, let me cut to the crux of the matter: those awful, dangerous people who horrifically murder 20,000 or so elephants every year and are out of control. They will now see action being taken, with Britain playing its role as a leader in the world. We must act, and I am pleased that we are acting, because history will judge us on the action we take to protect these animals today and in the months ahead.

As we have heard, it is not only elephants that are endangered, so I was reassured by the Minister’s confirmation that the Government intend to go further and to carry out a consultation. I know that Members on both sides of the House are grateful for that confirmation and will welcome an extension to species alive and extinct. We will watch the Government closely to ensure that that happens as soon as possible.

We are beginning to win this argument—and we must win it. There must no longer be any excuses for these murderers. There is so much money at stake, and they must not be allowed to sidestep our laws through little loopholes here and there and claim that their elephant ivory is from somewhere else. I thank all Ministers involved for taking this swift, smart action. I commend the people in my constituency who have said that they want this action and Members on both sides of the House who have called for it. Animals deserve the Bill. I am pleased that we are getting on and delivering it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

The reason that we have chosen this debate for our Opposition day is the real anger that people in Scotland feel about what has taken place. The Parliament that Scotland voted for in the referendum in 1997 is being attacked and our rights are being attacked by a Conservative Government, backed by their so-called Scottish Tory Friends, who went through the Lobby to take away powers from the Scottish Parliament. We are having this debate tonight. Let us look around us. I can see my colleagues from the SNP and, to be fair, I can see colleagues from the Liberal Democrats and the Labour MPs from Scotland are here as well. Where is the rest of the House? Where are the Conservative MPs who voted through those measures? They cannot even be bothered to turn up to defend what the Conservatives have done to Scotland. That is the reality.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I am not going to give way. Sit down.

It is very fitting that the SNP is using our Opposition day on 4 July, Independence Day, to defend the interests, the rights and the will of the Scottish people.—[Interruption.] Listen, it may not be Independence Day to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans), but I will tell him this: the way the Conservative party is treating Scotland, our independence day is coming and it is coming soon.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman says that Scotland’s independence is coming. The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) and I tabled an amendment to his motion—unfortunately, it was not selected, but we understand why. I wonder whether he would agree with that amendment to the motion on the basis that the Scottish people did have a vote in 2014 and they agreed to stay in the United Kingdom.

Ian Blackford: As a matter of fact, the hon. Gentleman is correct. Of course the people of Scotland voted in a referendum in 2014 and I say to him and others who put their name to the amendment that yes, we would have accepted it had it been taken this afternoon.

The fundamental issue, as many people have said, is that, when the polls opened in Scotland on 18 September 2014, between the hours of 7 o’clock in the morning and 10 o’clock at night, the people of Scotland had sovereignty in their hands. The difference between SNP Members and the Conservatives is that we believe the Scottish people are always sovereign. In the light of the change in the facts and the circumstances—those being that Scotland voted to stay in the European Union by a decisive majority, and that the wishes and the rights of the Scottish people are being ignored by a Conservative Government who want to drive us out of Europe—it is perfectly right that the people of Scotland have the opportunity to demonstrate their sovereign will.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman talks about referendums. I am getting a bit confused—it does not take a lot, I admit—but are we talking about the referendum on 23 June 2016, when the British people voted to leave the European Union and, if they had decided to remain in the European Union, would those powers still be in Brussels, to this day?

Ian Blackford: For anyone watching this with subtitles, it might say, “Not for viewers in Scotland” because the fact of the matter is that the people of Scotland voted to stay in the European Union. That is the point. In the debate that took place during Scotland’s referendum in 2014, we were told two things: that if we stayed in the United Kingdom, we were to lead the United Kingdom, but also that, if we voted to stay in the United Kingdom, then our part in Europe would also be preserved. What has happened? Any pretence of Scotland leading the UK has been thrown away by the Secretary of State for Scotland. He does not believe that we are a partner in the UK; he believes that we are a part of the UK. How can we have a Secretary of State for Scotland, who is supposed to represent Scotland’s interests, when he is prepared to lie down and be walked all over because he does not see Scotland as an equal part of the United Kingdom? [Interruption.] He can shout and scream in this Chamber, but the reality is that he has failed to defend Scotland’s interests. [Interruption.] Yes, you can point and gesticulate, but the people of Scotland—

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not pointing or gesticulating. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is breathing fire, with considerable eloquence and at some pace, but does he wish to take an intervention from the Secretary of State—yes or no?

Ian Blackford: I will not in this case. I am grateful, Mr Speaker. The Secretary of State will have an opportunity to speak later. I want to make progress because many Members wish to speak.

The claim of right acknowledges the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government, best suited to their need, and the obligation of elected representatives, in all their actions and deliberations, to ensure that the interests of the people of Scotland are paramount. The claim of right is not simply an historical document but a fundamental principle that underpins the democracy and constitutional framework of Scotland. The 1989 claim functions as a declaration of intent regarding the sovereignty of the Scottish people. It set the constitutional convention that, 10 years later, saw the people vote in a referendum for the re-establishment of a Scottish Parliament, which the UK Government now seek to undermine and ignore.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The right hon. Gentleman has referred to the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the claim of right in 1989. With the benefit of hindsight, does he think that it was a mistake for the Scottish National party not to sign the claim of right or take part in the constitutional convention?

Ian Blackford: I am going to come on to deal with that. I acknowledge the work of the constitutional convention, but let us not forget that the reason the SNP was in that position was that others in the constitutional convention would not allow the principle of independence to be discussed at that time. I am grateful for the enormous progress that we have made on the back of the constitutional convention. Before those
on Opposition Benches begin to jeer and snigger, yes, it is a fact that the Scottish National party was not present for the signing and did not take part in the convention. The SNP took part in early discussions, but withdrew when it became clear that the convention would not countenance independence. We believe, and continue to believe, that ruling out such an option was to deny a key principle of the claim to choose the best form of government, but we have always supported the sentiments of the claim of right. The SNP has committed, and recommitted, to its principle. We acknowledge the sovereign rights of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs.

Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): All heart.

Ian Blackford: I really, really hope that people in Scotland are watching this. A Conservative Member from south of the border who failed to be elected in Scotland says, “All heart.” This has nothing to do with heart—this is about the rights of the people of Scotland who voted for devolution and are finding that the UK Parliament is taking away their rights in the teeth of opposition from the Scottish Parliament and every single party there, with the exception of the Scottish Tories.

When will the Scottish Tories begin to listen to the people of Scotland? This is not about the SNP. This is about the Scottish Parliament. This is about the people of Scotland. Let us not forget that the Conservatives have lost every single election in Scotland since 1955. They have been defeated—[Interruption.] Yes, you can see—look at the 13 who have been elected. There are 35 of us here from the Scottish National party, which won the election for Scotland. That is the reality. The Conservatives are in a minority Administration in Parliament. They would love to have the majority of MPs that we have from Scotland, but it is not likely to happen.

We have defended the sentiment time and again, and we are here to do so again. “Why today?” some in the Chamber might ask. Well, the fact of the matter is that the circumstances have changed: we are being dragged out of Europe against our will. I expect that she wants us to stay in the single market and the customs union. She talks about a second referendum on Europe. What she should do is get behind the Scottish National party because, let me remind this House, in 2016 the SNP went to the people of Scotland and sought a mandate on having a referendum on Scottish independence if circumstances in Scotland changed. Guess what? We have a majority for independence in the Scottish Parliament. If you want to protect Scotland’s interests in Europe, and if you want to stay in the single market and the customs union, it may well be the case that independence for Scotland is the only way to do that.

Christine Jardine: All heart. Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: I am going to make progress.

Today, we ask the House to consider the claim of right, to recommit itself to the spirit of devolution and to place the people of Scotland at the heart of decisions, not cast them aside. Only a few weeks ago, we witnessed the shameful Tory power grab. This House and this Government showed nothing but utter contempt for the devolved Administrations as the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill was pushed through without consideration of the views of the devolved institutions. The Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly, by 93 votes to 30, to refuse legislative consent for clause 15 of the Bill. As such, the Bill should not have been passed through the House of Commons with the clause intact, but the Tories decided this was acceptable. They trotted through the Lobby, voting against the will of the Scottish people—that’s what you did.

We all know that the Sewel convention established the long-held practice that the UK Government cannot legislate on devolved areas without the consent of the devolved Parliament—or at least we thought we did. [Interruption.] Well, there we are: this is the sovereign Parliament. You might want to say that to your voters in Scotland: that you do not believe it is the people of Scotland who are sovereign, as was defined in the court case in 1953. You are prepared to throw away the sovereignty of the people of Scotland and allow Westminster to do whatever it likes. Frankly, that is not acceptable to the rest of us. How can you be Secretary of State for Scotland if you behave in such a way? That is not the Secretary of State for Scotland; that is the Government’s man in Scotland.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell)
Ian Blackford: Sit down! Sit down.

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before the right hon. Gentleman continues, may I appeal to colleagues to lower the temperature? Passion is fine, and of course the right hon. Gentleman has the floor and is perfectly entitled to refuse to take an intervention, but I think simply to say baldly, “Sit down” to any Member is less than the courtesy we normally get from the right hon. Gentleman. I know he may feel he is being provoked, but he must avoid being provoked. He is certainly not being provoked by the Secretary of State. Let us just try to lower the temperature and have the debate on the issues, rather than on personalities.

Ian Blackford: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Now, thanks to the Tories, we have reached a dangerous and difficult place, which has exposed their lack of commitment to the Sewel convention. Their Brexit power grab has basically ripped up the Sewel convention and plunged us into constitutional crisis. We are in unknown territory. Only if the UK Government act to recognise and respect the will of the Scottish Parliament can we repair some of the damage. I say again to the Government: you have acted without the consent of the Scottish Parliament.

Bring forward legislation that will protect the powers of the Scottish Parliament, and do it now. If the Secretary of State recognises his role in defending devolution, he should do so, and a failure to do that should mean, quite frankly, that he should resign because he is not standing up for the interests of the people of Scotland.

The House should know that it is not simply the SNP’s view that the Tory power grab has thrown the devolution settlement into crisis. In Scotland, the feeling is apparent everywhere you go. People right across Scotland want power in Scotland’s hands. Recent polling from NatCen revealed that a majority of Scots trust Holyrood to make decisions in areas that the Tories want to grab for Westminster. Over 60% want fishing decisions in Scotland following Brexit and 59% want farming powers in Scottish hands.

Of course, the Tories have form because we know that in 2013, the European Union voted to give additional payments to Scottish crofters and farmers—£230-odd million of additional support—86% of which was supposed to come to Scotland between 2016 and 2020. What has happened? Westminster has handed over 16.5%. The rest has gone into budgets across the rest of the United Kingdom, and crofters and farmers have been short-changed by a Government that have not accepted their obligations to Scottish farmers. It is little wonder that people in Scotland want to make sure that the Scottish Parliament have powers over farming and fishing, and not this Tory Government who have not just grabbed powers but have grabbed money out of the pockets of hard-working Scottish crofters and farmers.

A majority of Scots have lost confidence in the UK’s handling of Brexit, with a full 69% now saying that they believe it has been badly handled. During earlier debates, we heard the Tories trying to justify the UK Government’s shoddy power grab by falsely claiming that Scotland would not lose powers. However, the Scottish Government published a list of powers at risk. They include powers over fishing, farming, rail franchises and fracking licences, to name just a few, but this Government have shown disrespect to our Parliament more than once. Their legal challenges to the Scottish Parliament’s continuity Bill, for one, clearly show the arrogance of the Conservative Government when faced with the will of the Scottish people.

Why is it right that the Conservative Government believe that they can take the Scottish Parliament and, by extension, the Scottish people to court? That is exactly what is happening—what arrogance!

The Scottish Parliament voted by 95 votes to 32 to pass the continuity Bill, aimed at preparing Scotland’s laws for the impact of leaving the EU in the light of the refusal to grant a legislative consent motion to Westminster’s European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The people of Scotland expect the two Governments to co-operate on these matters. They also expect that the decisions and responsibilities of the Scottish Parliament should be respected. The decision, therefore, of the UK Government to attempt to overturn the will of the Scottish Parliament in the courts is unprecedented and unacceptable.

Christine Jardine: On that point, those who were responsible for framing the devolution settlement have assured me that what is happening now is what was intended and is included—[Interruption.] It is what people voted for in 1997 and is included in the devolution settlement. If the right hon. Gentleman is so concerned about Scotland being “dragged” out of the European Union, why does he not join us in backing a people’s vote on the final deal?

Ian Blackford: I simply say that if the hon. Lady wants to stay in Europe and in the single market and the customs union, there is already a mandate in the Scottish Parliament for a referendum of independence. Join us in protecting Scotland’s interests!

Mr Carmichael: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Ian Blackford: No, I will not—I am going to make progress.

Westminster cannot unilaterally rewrite the devolution settlement and impose UK-wide frameworks in devolved areas without consent. The truth of the matter is that right from the start of the Brexit process, we have seen the UK Government attempting to avoid all attempts at democratic engagement. It took a decision from the courts to force them to consult Parliament over the decision to trigger article 50. Similarly, the UK Government ignored all requests from the devolved Administrations to be involved in the process of triggering article 50, despite Scotland voting overwhelmingly to remain in the EU. Where was the respect? Where was the engagement? There was none.

The Tories have not just ignored the will of the Scottish Parliament; they ignore the interests of the Scottish people. For years, their austerity agenda has punished the people of Scotland. The Tory obsession with punishing the poor and protecting the rich has seen families struggle in hardship, women denied their right to a fair pension, and women who were victims of rape made to justify their rights to child benefit. It is absolutely shameful. The policies of this Tory Government are morally repugnant and have no place in a civilised, compassionate Scotland.
On 26 January 2012, Nicola Sturgeon, the First Minister of Scotland, led a debate on the claim of right with the motion that Parliament “acknowledge the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs, and do hereby declare and pledge that in all our actions and deliberations their interests shall be paramount.”

At that time, 102 MSPs voted for the motion, with 14 Tories voting against—the same old Tories voting against the sovereignty of the Scottish people. Even then, the Tories could not, would not, stand up for the Scottish people.

Ian Blackford: For the hard of hearing on the Labour Benches: Brexit.

The Tories pay lip service to devolution, but they do not believe in it. They do not believe that the Scottish people should have the right to determine the form of government that best suits their needs. What are they afraid of? They are afraid of power being in the hands of the Scottish people. Surely, we are all democrats. Surely, even the UK Government must now accept that it is the people we serve, not they who serve us. That is the crux of this debate. As outlined in the quote I began my remarks with, in Scotland things are different because our view of government is different: it is not top-down; it is ground-up. The single job of government is to serve the interests of our people. It is to carry out their will and to improve their lives—something the Tories have yet to learn.

Today, let the Tories learn this. In Scotland, the people of Scotland are sovereign and the Scottish Parliament embodies the sovereignty of the Scottish people. Next year sees the 20th anniversary of the Scottish Parliament. In 1997, the Conservatives opposed devolution, and they are still opposing it, which is why they are attacking the Scottish Parliament’s powers with such glee, led by this so-called Secretary of State for Scotland. He should be ashamed of himself.

Our Scottish Parliament finds itself under threat of a power grab from the very party that opposed its creation in the first place. More than two decades after Scotland voted for a Scottish Parliament, the UK Government’s withdrawal Bill constitutes the biggest power grab since devolution. The Secretary of State promised a “powers bonanza” to the Scottish Parliament, while his colleague the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs went as far as to suggest that immigration powers could be devolved to Scotland. Despite that promise, the Secretary of State for Scotland consistently failed to name one power in that bonanza coming back to Scotland. In December 2017, he promised that amendments would be made to the withdrawal Bill on Report, before going back on that promise and allowing amendments to be made only in the unelected House of Lords. The Secretary of State has not once apologised for the fact that the House of Commons never had that opportunity—and that this elected Chamber never had the opportunity to discuss amendments to a Bill that affected the devolution of Scotland—thus showing utter contempt for our Parliament and for our people. Since then the Secretary of State has been missing in action, refusing to lead on an emergency debate on the Sewel convention that was called by the SNP following a refusal to allow time for us to debate clause 15 once the Bill had returned from the House of Lords.

If Members are not convinced of the Secretary of State’s inadequacy for the job, let them hear this. He recently removed all doubt about his views by saying, “Scotland is not a partner in the UK.” Scotland is not equal: that is exactly what this Government think of the people of Scotland, and their actions reflect that sentiment. The Secretary of State cannot stand up for Scotland, because he does not recognise Scotland as a partner in the United Kingdom. He has unilaterally downgraded our role. It is little wonder that he is without consequence when it comes to standing up for Scotland. What a damning indictment of the Tory party!

David Mundell: The right hon. Gentleman is setting out his case for independence, which is to be based on deceit and misrepresentation. I never once said—and I have Hansard here to prove it—that Scotland was not part of the United Kingdom, or was not a partner in the United Kingdom. What SNP Members claim is that Scotland is a partner of the United Kingdom, because they want Scotland and the United Kingdom to be separate entities. They are not. Scotland is part of the United Kingdom; Scotland is at the heart of the United Kingdom; and, ultimately, that is what the right hon. Gentleman objects to.

Ian Blackford: What we object to is a Secretary of State who cannot do his job in standing up for the people of Scotland. The simple fact is that what we are talking about today is the claim of right for Scotland. We are not arguing for independence for Scotland, although that day will come. We are simply talking about the principle and about where sovereignty lies. We are affirming the rights of the people of Scotland to be sovereign. Everyone can see what is going on here. Conservative Members seem to be denying the rights of the people to that sovereignty.

Let me issue this challenge to the Conservatives, here and now: we have placed a motion before you. Have the guts to come through the Lobbies tonight with us, affirming the sovereignty of the Scottish people, or, if you do not dare, oppose the motion. Show that you have the guts to stand in the face of that motion. If you fail to do so, it will be the accepted will of this House that it has recognised the sovereignty of the Scottish people.
Tonight you have a choice. You can sit and chunter and shout and bawl and laugh, as you have done since the debate started, or you can go through the Lobbies later and stick up for the people of Scotland. You can affirm the sovereignty of the people of Scotland, or you can flunk it. History has shown that, on every step of the way, you have argued against the interests of the people of Scotland.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Let me just say that Members on this side never walked out and turned their backs on the people of Scotland from this Parliament, unlike those on the right hon. Gentleman’s side.

Ian Blackford: The simple fact is that we were faced with a situation—and the hon. Gentleman should be ashamed—in which the Conservative Government pushed through the withdrawal Bill, which took powers from the Scottish Parliament without a debate in the House. The hon. Gentleman and all his friends went through the Lobbies to take those powers from the people of Scotland. I am proud of the fact that it is the Scottish National party that is standing up for the people of Scotland. What the Conservatives are doing is allowing Scotland to be walked all over, and the hon. Gentleman and his friends are guilty as charged.

The Conservative party has no mandate to speak for Scotland, but thinks it can do whatever it wants to Scotland and get away with it. The Conservatives opposed devolution in the first place. They have consistently voted against Scotland’s interests and now they want to dismantle the rights of our Parliament, downgrading devolution and dismissing the views of the people of Scotland. The people of Scotland asked for none of this. They voted decisively against leaving the European Union, yet now they face the socioeconomic chaos from a hard Tory Brexit.

Before she became Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May) set out her view of “in which Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and England continue to flourish side-by-side as equal partners.” Yet the views of the people of Scotland are disregarded; instead the Prime Minister has shut out and silenced the people of Scotland from the Brexit debate. The Secretary of State for Scotland was not even invited to the meeting at Chequers where the Government discussed Brexit; his views were not called upon, inconsequential in the process the UK Government were going through.

While the Scottish Parliament is not yet 20 years old, it has made remarkable achievements in free education, personal care and prescriptions, world-leading climate change targets, the smoking ban, and huge strides forwards in attitude towards sectarianism, sexual equality and multiculturalism.

Meanwhile there is the question of waiting times. When we look at A&E in Scottish hospitals, we find that the record is far better than that of the Conservative Government in London, and the hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), rather than doing down the health service in Scotland, should be talking up the successes of the Scottish Parliament and Government in delivering for the people of Scotland.

Meanwhile in Westminster, the cruel and callous Tory policies, such as the rape clause, the bedroom tax, austerity and of course Brexit, stand in stark contrast to our approach. In Scotland we do things differently, and this place needs to recognise that the first step is for Westminster to respect the will of the Scottish Parliament. Will this place do it? Will this House recognise that the Scottish Parliament has not given a consent motion to the withdrawal Bill? Will this Parliament now recant and make sure the powers that have been grabbed are sent back to the Scottish Parliament? That is what the people of Scotland expect.

We were promised this in 2014: Gordon Brown said a no vote in the independence referendum would lead to changes offering “as close to federalism as possible”. In the end nothing close to that was delivered. And before the Tories leap from their Benches, I say yes, we in the SNP respect the will of the Scottish people decided in 2014, but the claim of right is important, because it allows the sovereignty of Scotland to choose, and that means that if Scotland decides it wants change, then it should be respected. Why should Conservatives stand in the way of the sovereignty and rights of the Scottish people, and why should Scottish Conservatives allow that to happen? Is their responsibility not to stand up for their constituents—for their needs and their wishes?

The Scottish Government were elected in May 2016 on a manifesto which said in relation to independence:

“This Scottish Parliament should have the right to hold another referendum...if there is a significant and material change in the circumstances that prevailed in 2014, such as Scotland being taken out the EU against our will.”

Given events since 2016, there is therefore no question about the legitimacy of the Scottish Parliament and the people of Scotland to consider the question of independence. Everything has changed.

This Parliament today must show that it understands, recognises and respects the right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs, including during this time of significant change. I urge all Members to defend the interests of the people of Scotland and to vote to recognise the claim of right of the Scottish people. Our people’s sovereignty—Scotland’s sovereignty—must be, and will be, respected.

6.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): May I begin by sharing the good wishes expressed towards George Reid, the former presiding officer of the Scottish Parliament? I voted for George Reid to be presiding officer in 1999 and again in 2003 because he was a man of substance. George Reid was not a man who would have come to this Chamber as an MP and dished out abuse to another Member and then failed to take an intervention. He was not a man who would have come to this Chamber and distorted the words of a fellow MP so that he could put forward his case. He was a man of principle who argued—and I am sure still argues—for independence on the basis of principle, not of deceit, abuse and misrepresentation.

This debate is a missed opportunity. We could have been discussing the future of Scotland. We could have spent the time talking about our plans to realise the sea of opportunity presented to our fishermen by leaving the EU. We could have talked about city deals, or our industrial strategy. Instead, we are having this debate, which says nothing about the future of Scotland but everything about the Scottish National party and their
obsession with independence. They are like a broken record. It is less than two years since Parliament debated the claim of right at the behest of the SNP. In the interim, we have had an electoral test in Scotland in the form of a general election. The result, as I recall, was that the SNP lost 21 seats and that there were 12 Conservative gains. That debate was a charade then—an excuse to talk about independence—and it is a charade today. But what else should we expect?

The leader of the SNP Westminster group, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), set out his position very clearly exactly a week ago. Nothing else matters to the SNP—not improving Scotland’s sluggish economy, and certainly not preparing Scotland for Brexit. For the right hon. Gentleman, Brexit is nothing more than a “clear road map to a second independence referendum”.

That is his stated priority.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is arguing that this debate is all about a second independence referendum and about the SNP. Can I ask him this: does he agree with article 1 of the charter of the United Nations?

David Mundell: I am sure that I do agree with article 1 of the charter of the United Nations. I believe in people’s right to self-determination, and I believe that the people of Scotland set out clearly what they wanted in the 2014 independence referendum. The problem is that the SNP cannot accept that most inconvenient of truths for them. The people of Scotland exercised their right to choose their future in 2014. They were very clear that they wished to remain in the United Kingdom. Shamefully, the SNP are determined to ignore them—the people they claim to represent. If the SNP truly believed in the rights of the Scottish people, would they not accept the result? Would they not listen to the Scottish people?

The claim of right in 1989 played an important part in the campaign for a Scottish Parliament. It was about devolution, and its authors were explicit in their aims. As we have already heard, the Scottish National party acknowledged as much when they refused to sign it. They refused to sign it because it had nothing to do with their own cause of independence. So in this debate we have not only the claim of right to consider; we also have the claim of rewriting history. That is a claim that has often been levelled at the SNP.

Rather than misrepresenting the claim of right as a means of justifying a second, unwanted independence referendum, the SNP should reflect on what it really means. It means that the UK Government respected the right of the people of Scotland to choose whether to remain part of the UK. It means that we worked with the Scottish Government to facilitate the referendum in 2014. It means that, together, we delivered a legal, fair and decisive vote. The decision of the people of Scotland—reaffirming their desire to have two Parliaments and two Governments—should be respected.

Joanna Cherry: Will the Minister give way?

David Mundell: Not at this stage.

The UK Government have consistently supported devolution. After the 2014 vote, we established the Smith commission with a view to expanding the powers of the Scottish Parliament. We delivered Lord Smith’s recommendations in full, adding wide-ranging new powers over tax and welfare to the devolution settlement and establishing Holyrood as one of the most powerful devolved legislatures in the world. We are committed to working closely with the Scottish Government to transfer the last of the new powers smoothly and securely, and devolution will be strengthened further as we leave the EU and powers that have been held in Brussels for 40 years flow to Holyrood.

It is surely a strange kind of power grab that leaves the grabbed with more power than ever. I have been disappointed, but not in the slightest bit surprised, by the SNP’s power grab scaremongering, their hot air and their grandstanding stunts. However, I was surprised when the whole confection of the alleged power grab was shot down by none other than Nicola Sturgeon during her reshuffle last week. She said, “I need more Ministers because of all the extra powers that the Scottish Government must exercise.” It was incredible.

The UK Government are working closely with the Scottish Government as powers return from Brussels, and I do not think that more than 80 powers returning directly to the Scottish Parliament should be scoffed at. It is a real opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to continue to shape what is best for Scotland. Throughout the process we have followed, and will follow, the Sewel convention—one of the pillars of the devolution settlement. It is a cast-iron commitment and not difficult to make because, unlike the SNP, we believe in devolution.

The people of Scotland voted for devolution in 1997. We accepted their decision and embraced devolution. The people of Scotland reaffirmed their support for remaining in the United Kingdom in 2014. In every election to the Scottish Parliament since 1999, a majority of voters have backed parties that support devolution. How much democracy does the SNP need before it gets the message?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): Was Ruth Davidson not spot on when she said after the independence referendum that it was entirely legitimate, even honourable, for the SNP to continue to argue its case for Scottish independence?

David Mundell: Indeed. It is perfectly legitimate and even honourable for the SNP to argue the case for independence, but not on the pretext that it is standing up for devolution, in which it clearly does not believe.

The SNP has neither accepted nor supported devolution other than as a stepping stone to independence. It does not want devolution to succeed and seeks any excuse to undermine it. Within minutes of the result of the EU referendum being declared, Nicola Sturgeon put her civil servants to work drawing up plans for a second independence referendum and, in the same breath, airbrushed from history the 1 million people in Scotland who voted to leave the EU—500,000 of them probably SNP supporters, whose views have been completely disregarded.

The SNP has sought not to deliver Brexit—that would be respecting voters across the UK, which it finds impossible—but to weaponise it in its campaign
for independence. I am pleased to say the Prime Minister has been clear about the SNP’s obsession with independence. The PM said last year: “Now is not the time”. Our position is exactly the same today. It will not be the time in the autumn; nor will it be when we leave the EU in the spring of next year. We will respect the wishes of the Scottish people which, as opinion polls have consistently shown, have not changed since 2014. The nationalists should do the same.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman makes much of the result of the EU referendum, but he refuses to accept that the result in Scotland was different. Okay, assuming for a moment that he is correct, would he care to comment on John Major’s analysis of the EU referendum? He said: “Many electors now know they were misled” and that the leave campaign was verging on “squalid”.

David Mundell: People have strong views about the EU referendum, but a vote was held throughout the United Kingdom, and it was clear from the outset that it would be. The majority of people across the UK voted to leave the EU, and I respect that decision.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that the crucial problem here is that SNP Members appear to be completely unable to distinguish between the will of the Scottish people and the whim of the Scottish National Party?

David Mundell: Indeed, my hon. Friend is right. This is all about independence. Everything put to us this evening—the complaints about the current constitutional arrangements—is not about standing up against those arrangements or standing up for Scotland in the devolution settlement but about finding a way to put yet another argument for independence.

SNP Members are ignoring the wishes of the Scottish people, and they are losing the argument. In fact, they are no longer arguing at all, except among themselves. The speech by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber was as much for an SNP conference, for a core SNP audience, as it was for this Chamber. I do not know, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you remember the big tent that they promised to put up after their defeat in the 2014 referendum to encourage more people to support their cause—their promise to listen, for once, to the majority of Scots. Well, the big tent has been torn down. All we have now are manufactured grievances. They invent; they misrepresent; they abuse. They try to shout down those who disagree with them. They glory in childish stunts that embarrass the people they purport to represent. If we believe in democracy and the principle contained in the claim of right, the most important thing we must do is listen to the people. We must respect the votes they have cast. We must listen when they say they do not want a second, divisive independence referendum.

I am happy to support the motion this evening—I would have preferred it if the amendment had been selected and added—because I do believe that the people of Scotland determine their constitutional future. They have done that: they want to stay in the United Kingdom.

6.37 pm

Lesley Laird (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): I have no doubt that today’s debate simply sums up what passes as political leadership in Scotland. Indeed, we have already heard the gist of it from the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). The majority of people in Scotland are entirely sick of it.

The people of Scotland are stuck between two competing nationalist Governments, which results in debates like the one we will hear tonight. For hon. Members who are not from Scotland: if people in the UK are fed up with listening to talk of Brexit, on which the referendum was only two years ago, just think how fed up people in Scotland are every time they hear the word “independence.”

Before 2014, depending on who we listened to, we were told that the independence referendum was a once-in-a-generation or a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We even heard that in the Scottish Government’s White Paper—question 557 on page 566—which turns out to be one more piece of proof that the White Paper was a work of fiction, cobbled together at taxpayers’ expense.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: If not cobbled together, what was Gordon Brown’s description of Scotland getting the closest thing to federalism possible if it voted no?

Lesley Laird: As Members have touched on, the vow was fully delivered. The fact that the Scottish Government have had to increase the size of the Cabinet so much in the past few years simply reflects the fact that they have more powers and that they are recognised as the most powerful independent Parliament in the UK.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Lesley Laird: I will move on.

Here we are today, not four years after the referendum, and the issue has never gone away. Labour’s position on the claim of right is unambiguous. We helped to write it; we signed it; we supported it in the past, and we will support it in the future. The claim of right states that the Scottish people have the sovereign right to determine the form of government best suited to their needs. Determining the form of government best suited to their needs is exactly what people in Scotland already do and it is exactly what they did in the 2014 independence referendum. People in Scotland were faced with a choice: to leave the United Kingdom and have the Scottish Government as their sole Government, or to remain in the United Kingdom and have two Governments. They chose the latter, by 55% to 45%.

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): The motion talks about the claim of right, rather than the votes we have had previously. Labour used to support this, so I wonder whether the hon. Lady feels she might be able to support the motion this evening.

Lesley Laird: Labour will always be happy to support the claim of right—I have just outlined that position.

Several hon. Members rose—

Lesley Laird: If Members will allow me to continue, I will expand further on that point. The form of government that people in Scotland chose was that of dual governance,
something that the SNP has failed to accept. It is not what is best for Scotland that SNP Members are interested in, but what is best for their single obsession. If anyone thinks otherwise, the launch of a petition today on rewriting the claim of right to reference only independence should leave no one in any doubt about the SNP’s priorities. The Labour party supported the current claim of right. In fact, I would argue that the claim of right was instrumental in the Scottish Constitutional Convention that led to devolution in Scotland. That fact goes to the heart of the issue we face today. Two parties did not sign the claim of right in 1989—the SNP and the Conservatives. Why did they not sign it? The Tories never signed it because they did not believe in devolution, and, as their recent performances show, they still do not. The SNP never signed it because the SNP has never been interested in devolution—it has always been, and still is, all about independence. The irony now is that the SNP is asking the House to support the principles of something that it never signed up to in the first place! Again, I guess we are where we are.

Let me talk about where we are today. This is the SNP’s half-day debate, one of only three Opposition day debates the SNP gets a year. Is it not extraordinary that of all the things that the SNP could have used this time to talk about this is what they opted for? It is absolutely extraordinary, except of course when it is seen through the narrow prism of the SNP’s obsession. Politics will always be about priorities.

Stephen Kerr: It is extraordinary that the SNP has chosen this subject for its half-day debate. What is even more extraordinary is the performance of the leader of the SNP in this place. It is with great sadness that I reflect on how diminished a personage he now is in the eyes of this House because of the way in which he has conducted himself in these debates. He has been largely impolite. He has shouted abuse across the Floor of the House. Does the hon. Lady agree that the standards of Parliament demand that we set a high standard—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Enough.

Lesley Laird: I think the Speaker set out clearly the standards that are expected of all Members. As the hon. Gentleman highlighted, the public are indeed watching.

As I was saying, politics is, as ever, about priorities. By neglecting so many serious issues today, the SNP has shown contempt for the real issue and the issues of their constituents. The SNP could have chosen to talk about issues of welfare as they affect Scotland, such as the unfair treatment of terminally ill patients or the motor neurone disease group that has come to London, even in the bitter snow, to plead for reform of the assessment programme. The SNP could have chosen to talk about the fact that 52% of people living in poverty in Scotland are actually in work. The SNP could have chosen to talk about the unprecedented growth in the use of food banks. In my own constituency, Kirkcaldy food bank has seen its spend go from £3,000 a month to £8,000 a month now.

SNP Members could have chosen to talk about the one in four children in Scotland living in poverty, and they could have supported Scottish Labour’s amendment to the Bill in the Scottish Parliament, but they did not. They could have chosen to talk about the thousands of 1950s women who have had their pension callously and cruelly cut by the Conservative Government. They could have chosen to talk about the need for investment in shipbuilding in Rosyth and Govan and the UK Government’s decision to put the fleet solid support ships contract out to international tender. They could have chosen to talk about industrial strategy, or lack of it, and how that impacts on Scottish jobs, or about the hostile immigration policy that has seen Giorgi, a 10-year-old orphaned boy facing uncertainty and the Kamil family going on hunger strike, an issued raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney). These are real people, with real-life issues, and they need MPs like us to use this platform to raise their issues. But no, instead, SNP Members chose to talk about what they always talk about; instead, they chose to debate the only thing that truly matters to them: the constitution and indyref2.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The hon. Lady just listed a number of subjects that she wants to be debated; will she confirm which of them Labour will choose as the subject of its Opposition day debate next week?

Lesley Laird: I am happy to confirm that to the hon. Gentleman after this debate; I am focused on the matter at hand.

We are where we are. Labour is opposed to a second referendum. People in Scotland made their decision and they decided to remain part of the UK. YouGov polling from June shows that absolutely nothing has changed: it is still 55% to 45%.

In the light of the SNP growth commission paper, Labour would not stand by and see the people of Scotland being subjected to at least another 10 years of austerity just to balance the books. The reality of the “cuts commission” is there for all to see. Read it and weep about what the SNP is prepared to inflict upon the Scottish people, all in the name of independence. My colleagues in the Scottish Parliament will always oppose it.

Labour is clear that the fight against indyref2 is not for this place, because—let me be clear—at that point it is about process. If people in Scotland elect to the Scottish Parliament parties that wish to hold a second referendum, it is not for Westminster to deny them that right. That is exactly what the claim of right is about, and we were to vote against that, we would not be upholding the principle of the claim of right.

I wish now to make some points to Government Members and ask them to do something that they have failed to do so far, which is listen. I was delighted that the Secretary of State indicated that he was prepared to listen this evening. Your actions are fanning the fires of a second independence referendum. The UK Government’s complete inability to negotiate Brexit, layered on top of their inability to engage in a meaningful way with the Scottish Government on Brexit, has led us down this path. That is what has led to the constitutional bind in which we find ourselves. I find that astounding for a party that claims to be the protector of the Union.
Government Members know that the SNP’s cause is always furthered by grievance, so why would the UK Government allow grievances to occur and to be exploited, when they have it in their gift to address real concerns? Because Scotland’s voice has been shut out of the Brexit negotiations. There has been no Joint Ministerial Committee for eight months. Discussions between the Governments have broken down entirely. There has been no debate on the final devolution amendments.

David Mundell: I know that some Opposition Members—I would not have thought the hon. Lady was among them—want to talk up this point about relations having broken down and to say that the Governments are not in contact, but there is a JMC meeting tomorrow.

Lesley Laird: I am absolutely delighted about that; let us hope it is more productive than the previous two meetings, which were cancelled.

The Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly to withhold consent for the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, yet the Government are still not listening. I simply say to Government Members and to the Secretary of State: what did the UK Government expect to happen?

Our constituents do not want us to stand in the House of Commons giving each other a history lesson. They want us to be here defending them and addressing the gross inequality that we see in our society. As we all know, we do not have to look very far to see that. Independence will not solve the problems that we face in our society. I argue that, based on the “cuts commission”, the inequality that we see in our society would become even greater.

People in Scotland do have the right to determine the Government best suited to their needs, and the choice is becoming very, very clear. A vote for the Tories is a vote for austerity, and a vote for the SNP is a vote for austerity. A vote for the Labour party is a vote for jobs, for investment in health and education and for a different way of doing things that addresses the fundamental issues that matter to people day in and day out.

Labour has committed to ending this austerity junket, and we commit ourselves to an economy that works for the people, rather than people simply working for the economy. We have committed to major investment in Scotland. In March, my right hon. Friend, the shadow Chancellor, detailed how Scotland would benefit to the tune of £70 billion over the course of 10 years if there were a Labour Government across the UK. Some £30 billion of that would be from Barnett consequentials, which means greater investment in our schools, our NHS, our local communities and our police and fire services. The only way that the people in Scotland will see the change that their society requires is from a radical Labour Government who have the political will to tackle poverty and inequality, extend public ownership and redistribute power from the few to the many. That is the economic and social transformation that Scotland urgently needs, and that will not come from another referendum on leaving the UK. The sovereign people of Scotland have already clearly expressed their view; it is time to respect it.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Before I call the next speaker, it will be obvious to the House that a great many people wish to speak this evening and that we have limited time. There will therefore be an initial time limit of eight minutes, though that might be reduced.

Before I call the next person to speak, let me say that I hesitate always to interrupt someone when they are in the flow of their rhetoric, but it has been very difficult not to do so when several people this evening have used the word “you” when they are talking about other people in this Chamber. In this Chamber, the word “you” means the Chair. There is a good reason for not saying “you”, because “you” is a very direct, personal criticism, whereas “the hon. Gentleman” or “the hon. Lady” is once removed, and that is how we do things in this Chamber. It is very important to keep that distance when we have a heated debate, so although I have not interrupted anybody so far for the use of the word “you”, I will from now on. You—I am allowed to say “you”—have been warned.

6.52 pm

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I can use the word “you”, I will say that it is great to see you in the Chair for this important debate about Scotland.

I have to say that I love this place; I love the Chamber— Corruption, / The hon. Member for Glasgow, East (David Linden) says that I love the Nou Camp. Yes, I do. It was a great honour and privilege for me, as someone from Moray who started on football pitches at Forres Academy, to reach the Nou Camp.

David Linden rose—

Douglas Ross: I will come to the hon. Gentleman in a minute.

I was very grateful for the support that I received in Moray from people who were not impressed by the antics of the SNP, which forced me to give up a lifetime ambition. That has happened, and I accept it—I am delighted to be here tonight to speak—but to make such petty remarks is really following in the footsteps of the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), and I hope that, as I give way to the hon. Gentleman, he will consider his tone in this debate.

David Linden: The point is that on the night when the hon. Gentleman was at the Nou Camp, he was not here scrutinising the Government on universal credit.

Douglas Ross: That debate on universal credit was one in which I was never intending to speak, and that night’s vote was very interesting, because no one voted against the motion on universal credit. The debate was called for by SNP Members, and they then manufactured a vote. We will all be looking very closely at manufactured votes if there is consensus in the Chamber tonight on what we are debating.

I agreed wholeheartedly with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr). I started off by saying that I love this place. I love this Chamber and I love these Benches, but tonight, for the first time, I have not enjoyed it. I like the cut and thrust of debate as much as anyone else, but I do not agree with the personal attacks on the Secretary of State for Scotland that we saw from the right hon. Member for...
Ross, Skye and Lochaber. Hon. Members can disagree with the office and with what the Secretary of State is doing, but to get so personal—to play the man rather than the ball—does not serve the right hon. Gentleman well and does not serve his party well. When I tried to intervene on the right hon. Gentleman, he was throwing his arm at me disrespectfully and he had to be called out by Mr Speaker for his actions. I hope that after this Opposition day debate he will reflect on the way in which he performs in this Chamber, because Scotland is watching and Scotland wants to see its politicians in both Parliaments working together where they can, and constructively disagreeing when that has to happen, but not doing so in such a personal way. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman's current silence means that he is reflecting on what he said and, more importantly, how he said it.

Ian Blackford: I want to reiterate that my opposition to the Conservatives and the Secretary of State is entirely political; I have said nothing personal. I ask the hon. Gentleman to reflect on this: it is a matter of record that two weeks ago, I was asked to commit suicide by a Conservative Member of Parliament. I will also say to the hon. Gentleman something that I have not yet raised in this House. Last night, while sitting on these Benches—this was witnessed by other people—I was told what to do in very explicit terms involving a four-letter word beginning with F that has previously been used by the Foreign Secretary, so I am not going to take any lectures from Government Members about how to behave. I am the one who is being abused by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues by being told to commit suicide and being told to “F off”, so I am not going to take any lectures from him. [Applause.]

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Let me just make it clear: no clapping; just shouts of “Hear, hear.” It is fine to support, but no clapping.

Douglas Ross: The point that I was trying to get at is that the mask is slipping with the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber and the SNP. He mentions actions that took place last night. I hope that his own Members reflect on what an hon. Lady—she is not here, so I will not name her—did at the conclusion of last night’s debate with her actions towards my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling. I know that that will have been noted by SNP Members, and that behaviour also cannot be allowed to continue in this House.

Twenty-four hours is a long time in politics. Yesterday, a debate about the economy of Scotland—about the amount of money that Scotland gets from Westminster to spend in the devolved Administration—could only attract two SNP MPs. Yet a debate about the constitution and the SNP’s obsession with independence can attract two SNP MPs. Yet a debate about the economy of Scotland—about the amount of money that Scotland gets from Westminster—could only amount to spending in the devolved Administration—could only be allowed to continue in this House.

A debate about the constitution, the SNP’s obsession with independence can attract two SNP MPs. Yet a debate about the economy of Scotland—about the amount of money that Scotland gets from Westminster—could only amount to spending in the devolved Administration—could only be allowed to continue in this House.

I mention education particularly because SNP spokespeople and Back Benchers quite often stand up in the Chamber to ask the Government to do exactly what is being done in Scotland. Well, I hope that they never do that again with education, because in Scotland the SNP has had to withdraw its flagship Bill on education—its No. 1 priority, about which the First Minister and leader of the SNP said, “This will get all our attention.” That is how big a priority education is for the SNP. What about higher education? The First Minister of Scotland nominated someone who had deplorable views on transgender people, on black people and on Jews. That is also why SNP Members cannot discuss education in their Opposition day debate.

Patricia Gibson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It appears that the gentleman who is speaking is not paying any attention to the motion before the House. Could I have your guidance on whether his rambling remarks are actually in order?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I understand the point that the hon. Lady is making; several of her colleagues have been gesticulating to similar effect. I have been paying careful attention to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, and I have every confidence that having introduced various other topics about which this debate is not, he is now going to come to the motion before us and the substance of the debate, which is the claim of right.

Douglas Ross: I am very grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am coming to that, but it is important that the Secretary of State for Scotland and the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland discussed the key issues that we should be debating today.

Before I move on, I will refer to a comment made by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. He said that Conservative Members should be praising the NHS. Well, I would have liked to have a debate about the NHS today, because I am quite happy to praise—it. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) expresses great displeasure about that, but can she understand my anger today
as the Member of Parliament for Moray who got a phone call from NHS Grampian to be told that for the next 12 to 18 months, because of the way that the SNP has overseen the NHS in Scotland, pregnant women will have to travel to Aberdeen or Inverness to give birth? [ Interruption. ] That is an important issue, and whether we are in this place or in Holyrood, we should not try to talk—[ Interruption. ] The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) should not try to talk down, for I am standing up for pregnant women who are faced with these concerns.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Gentleman has just been busy telling us how much he loves this place, but if he wants to debate the state of the Scottish NHS, he should be in the Scottish Parliament. Does he not understand the difference between reserved and devolved powers?

Douglas Ross: Again, this is the reaction we get from the SNP. If we disagree with SNP Members or say something they do not like, we are told that we do not understand things—so I am too thick to understand what is reserved and what is devolved. What I do understand is that I am a representative of my constituency, and when my constituents come to me raising these concerns, I should be able to shout—and loudly shout—about them in this Chamber, as colleagues could in Holyrood.

I will come to what we are debating: the claim of right—[ Interruption. ] The right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber took 55 minutes to make his speech on this matter and I have eight minutes to make mine. It is important that we consider the motion. The claim of right is very clear and we all support it. It says that the Scottish people are sovereign and can choose the Parliament that best suits their needs. We gave them that opportunity in 2014, when the right hon. Gentleman, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West and all the other SNP Members campaigned and voted for Scotland to be separated from the rest of the United Kingdom, and I, other Conservative Members, and people across Scotland and the UK, campaigned and voted for Scotland to remain an integral part of the United Kingdom. That decision has been taken. I went into the polling station in Moray and went to the count, knowing, I thought, that it was a one-in-a-generation event, because that was what we were promised by the former leader of the SNP and by its current leader.

But that is not good enough for SNP Members, because they are obsessed by independence. They will only speak about independence. They will not speak about healthcare, about education—about important issues for my Moray constituents and for Scotland. They are talking Scotland down by obsessing about independence rather than standing up for their constituents.

7.4 pm

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Today’s debate is not just important for the people of Scotland, but of great importance to the many peoples and nations throughout the world—notably our friends in Catalonia and the political prisoners there, to whom I would like to pay my respects. At the heart of today’s debate is human rights, and specifically a people’s right to self-determination. That is enshrined in international law under article 1 of the United Nations charter, which states that one of the purposes of the UN is to “develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples”. I do not believe that anyone in this place—not even Tory Members—would say that Scotland’s people are not a nation. The only conclusion that can be drawn is that Scotland’s people and Parliament have the power to decide their own future.

As the motion states—I am speaking to the motion—it is the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the “form of government best suited to their needs”.

And no one else’s right. I respect the opinion of people here who believe that Scotland should remain in the UK, and Scotland did vote to do so, but that was before it voted to remain in the EU. I ask those same people to respect the will of the Scottish people on that matter.

Mr Carmichael: What Scotland voted for was for the United Kingdom to remain part of the European Union. I campaigned and voted for that, but I did not want to see my vote then used as a lever to break up the United Kingdom. When the hon. Lady tries to do that, she does so not in my name or in the name of the majority of my constituents.

Marion Fellows: The right hon. Gentleman is looking very angrily at me.

Mr Carmichael: That is just my natural expression; you can’t hold that against me.

Marion Fellows: In that case, I apologise.

We will never agree on this. We are talking about the sovereign right of the Scottish people. I choose not to divide my country. I love my country. When I talk to people in Motherwell and Wishaw, the one thing they say they really love is their Scottish Parliament. That is why we are talking about the claim of right.

We can exchange figures, numbers and percentages, but what is important is that decisions were made by the Scottish people based on the circumstances of the time. That is the very nature of democracy, from elections to referendums. Today’s political reality is that there have been major upheavals to the fundamental political and economic circumstances of modern-day Scotland, and it is on that basis that Scotland must again reconsider its options.

Scotland is at a crossroads. We must decide not only what form of government best suits our needs, but what type of country we are. That discussion is going on in homes, communities and workplaces across Scotland as people slowly but surely decide. People in Scotland see the Prime Minister walking hand in hand with Donald Trump. They see the rich getting richer while their communities and neighbours struggle. They see this place treating Scotland with utter disdain, giving devolution only 15 minutes of consideration—and that time was totally taken up by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. With foreign wars, nuclear weapons on the Clyde, food bank use through the roof and precarious low-paid employment, people in Scotland imagine something better for their lives which Westminster has failed time and again to deliver: peace, security and more power over the decisions that affect their lives.
Christine Jardine: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Marion Fellows: No, because I have only three minutes left.

Scotland is not a country that is quick to take to the streets, but what the recent independence demonstrations have shown, as have the past demonstrations against Westminster’s poll tax and Thatcher’s decimation of Scottish industry, is that once Scotland has made up its mind, it will continue to pursue its interests in the face of adversity. Anyone who opposes Scotland’s sovereign right is exposing a truth widely held in Scotland, and indeed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, that we are not an equal partner in the UK and that we must ask permission to make our own decisions.

David Mundell: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Marion Fellows: I only have three minutes left, so I cannot give way.

Those people are exposing the fact that a democratically elected Parliament’s decision to hold a referendum—the most direct form of democracy imaginable—must be rubber-stamped by Westminster. Anyone who recognises and celebrates the no vote of 2014 but then seeks to undermine Scotland’s sovereignty by discrediting any future vote exposes a crucial contradiction in their argument and does not understand the pride that the Scottish people take in their Parliament.

Christine Jardine: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Marion Fellows: No, I want to finish my speech.

Christine Jardine: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Marion Fellows: No, I am going to continue.

While the UK Government seek to evaporate the Sewel convention and rely on outdated principles of Westminster sovereignty, the people of Scotland will be the ones who decide where their legitimate government and interests lie. No politician, party or Parliament can; this is about the Scottish people. Whatever the outcome of this debate, it will always be the case that Scotland’s sovereignty does not need to be recognised by parties that Scotland rejects or by Westminster; its sovereignty needs to be recognised only by the people of Scotland themselves.

I am sorry that the amendment that was tabled has not been selected, but as the claim of right exists, the only thing that is decisive is the will of the Scottish people as expressed through elections and referendums. That will is fluid and changing. We only need to look at the opinion polls—they have been taken all the way through from 2014—since the Brexit vote. The minority Conservative Government are well aware of those polls. Anyone who opposes Scotland’s sovereign right is exposing a truth widely held in Scotland, and indeed by the Secretary of State for Scotland, that we are not an equal partner in the UK and that we must ask permission to make our own decisions.

I want to put on the record that I am fully aware that it is the people of Stirling who are my boss. They put me here—and, of course, they can remove me from here—on the basis of a manifesto that included a commitment from my party to work constructively to see our country progress from being a member of the European Union to leaving the European Union. That is what I am here to do and it is a privilege to do so.

I was reminded earlier today by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman)—he is not of course in his place—about Adam Smith’s saying on the Union. He described the Union as “a measure from which infinite good has been derived to this country.” When he said “this country”, he of course meant Scotland.

Constitutional historians and scholars of religious tumult in 16th-century Scotland will realise that the foundation of the ideas in the claim of right comes from the works of George Buchanan on contractual monarchy. George Buchanan was from Killearn, a village in the west of my constituency and a superb place to visit. I heartily recommend the Three Sisters Bake bakery when Members visit Killearn. I do not know whether it is appropriate to refer to George Buchanan, a deceased person, as my constituent. He is buried in the kirk of Greyfriars in Edinburgh, but he was born, taught and preached in Stirling. In Killearn, there is a monument to its famous son for his work in establishing a constitutional framework for Scotland that would firmly allow the Scots to be governed by Presbyterianism. His assertion, appealing to biblical precedent, was that kings are in a contract with their people, who have a right—nay, a responsibility—to remove irresponsible, ungodly and tyrannical kings, lest the wrath of the Almighty fall upon the people. The great obelisk dominating the Killearn skyline is a testament to this great constitutional theorist, whose thoughts dominated Scottish politics in the 16th and 17th centuries.

These are the thoughts that the writers, preachers and revolutionaries of the Scottish Reformation espoused. Unlike the English, our Reformation was a bottom-up one inspired by the people, rather than a top-down one imposed by a tyrannical Tudor monarch. Preachers such as Knox, Melville and Henderson fought for the idea that the people should be able to set the direction of their country.

Martin Docherty-Hughes (West Dunbartonshire) (SNP): Given that the hon. Gentleman’s party wishes to take back control from the European Union, why, in doing so, is it giving it to the episcopacy of the Church of England in the House of Lords?

Stephen Kerr: Of course, it is not the 1689 claim of right that is being debated today, but the 1989 one. The two are closely related as they both make reference to sovereignty resting squarely with the people—and I will vote for the motion tonight. These ideas build on the work of George Buchanan and the idea of sovereignty imbued with the righteous principle of vox populi, vox Dei.

The claim of right is specific and relates to the establishment of a Scottish Assembly, as it was then called—a promise delivered by the referendum of 1997, which returned a resounding yes vote. The principle is extendable, but it requires careful consideration. The principle of popular sovereignty must be used carefully. We should always seek to protect the views and interests
of minorities. We do not have to look back very far in our history to see how popular sentiment has been used to justify some of the worst acts of oppression against minorities. Let us not forget the 85% of Scots who opposed the recommendations of the Wolfenden report in 1957, compared with nearly 51% in England. The fear expressed in popular will led to homosexuality in Scotland remaining illegal until 1980.

I belong to a Church that, historically, has seen a great deal of persecution as a result of fear, misunderstanding and prejudice. I understand only too well the prejudices that can be used by politicians to incite bigotry. When politicians feed on our worst fears and play to the crowd, they whip up a monster that is often uncontrollable, and do so with the excuse of projecting the popular will. I saw that last week with bigotry expressed against my constituents, especially those who voted for me, with the so-called All Under One Banner march in Stirling being led by a banner that stated, “Tory Scum Out”. That parade was attended by elected Members of the Scottish Parliament and, I think, of this place, too.

Joanna Cherry: The hon. Gentleman mentioned that the majority of Scots in the 50s opposed the Wolfenden report and seemed to make that an argument against popular sovereignty. However, did not the majority of Members in this House oppose the emancipation of homosexual men for many years? Was it not human rights that brought about that emancipation and adherence to the convention on human rights, which his party seemed to oppose? It is not about popular sovereignty and parliamentary sovereignty—it is about the rule of law.

Stephen Kerr: I think the hon. and learned Lady knows full well the point that I am trying to make. [Interruption.] Well, it should not worry her.

As politicians, it is our job to lead well, not pander to people’s worst instincts, and to protect the principle that minority views and opinions must be respected. We have to remember that we are here, not to follow instructions from our constituents, but to lead. We have to make the case for a better country, a more tolerant country and a country that respects all. The representative democracy that we have in our country is worth preserving. It is representative democracy that has gone against popular sentiment in leading social change in our country, and long may it continue to do so. However, the popular will must always be in our mind.

Policy making by referendum is impractical. It does not provide an opportunity to secure real social change and poses a risk to the protection of minorities. In the history of our country, we have had an unprecedented number of referendums that have been constitutional in nature. Since 1975, people in Scotland have taken part in six referendums—on Europe; Scotland; Scotland; electoral reform; Scotland; and Europe. In other lands; with different constitutional set-ups, referendums are more regular and more established in constitutional law. The Scottish referendum of 1997 still required a Westminster Act of Parliament to set up the Scottish Parliament.

This House is passing legislation to interpret and undertake the popular instruction to leave the European Union. The principle of respecting the will of the people is one that I agree with fundamentally. Whether it is the people of the United Kingdom voting to leave the EU, or the people of Scotland voting to keep the United Kingdom together, I agree wholeheartedly with the principle of respecting the will of the people. It is for Government to remember that, and the fact that the SNP Government in Edinburgh are agitating for a second independence referendum is a betrayal of the principle of popular sovereignty. When the people have spoken, as they did, it is time for Government to shut up.

When I speak to people in my constituency, they talk about indyref2 and tell me that they want the SNP to stop talking about that and get on with running the country. When they talk about leaving the EU, they tell me that the Government should get on with it. It is for Government to get on with it. This debate feels like the exact opposite. Debating what to most people are somewhat obscure constitutional matters seems like navel gazing, rather than focusing on the real work of government. People want the Government to work together and they want the Government to be effective, so they can get on with their lives unencumbered by constant politics. We need governmental systems that allow for this at all levels of government—Scottish, UK and local government—to work together to build a future for our country.

As I have said many times, Mr Speaker, I am confident that the work of our Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal, by showing a true partnership between Holyrood, Westminster and our local councils, will bear fruit. It will build a common set of economic objectives and do so by people working together. We need similar partnership working to be implemented elsewhere. On policy frameworks, we need systems that allow for decision making without gridlock. We need democratic oversight and efficient government. The rancour and the grievance that is generated by the SNP are unhelpful to all this. This debate is unhelpful to all this.

Let me conclude by saying that this is a debate on an obscure statement that has virtually no impact on the day-to-day lives of the constituents I am here to serve. No doubt many Members will find much to debate and discuss over the constitutional efficacy of the claim of right—whether popular sovereignty is right or wrong, drawing heavily on legal precedent and historical principles—but I would rather focus on improving the lives of my constituents and having a down-to-earth working Government. Let us focus on the pragmatic. Let us focus on getting on with the work of government. After all, is that not what our constituents would expect of us?

7.21 pm

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

At one minute past midnight this morning, the SNP Chief Whip, the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), no doubt still up late celebrating England’s win in the World cup, tweeted: breaking news, this is the very first debate we will have in Parliament on the claim of right. He obviously forgot that he had a debate on the claim of right, in his very own name, on 9 September 2016 in Westminster Hall.
I agree with many colleagues across the House that I would rather be speaking here this evening on issues relevant to my constituents and my constituency. The dilution of local policing across Scotland is showing a crime spree of house breaking and car breaking in my constituency. There is a GP crisis in my constituency. People cannot sign up to GPs. They are on waiting lists and are being kicked out of surgeries. People are waiting up to two years for operations when they used to wait only 12 weeks. The train service is in meltdown and we have an economy the Secretary of State was right to say is sluggish.

After all the debates we have had since 2016, and everything in between, we still have no answers to the big questions about what an independent Scotland would look like. We have had a Growth Commission paper that is as big an act of fiction as the original White Paper. I agree with the claim of right. The shadow Secretary of State was right. Labour invented this process and drove it on back in the late 1980s. The late great Jimmy Hood, if he were still alive today, would be championing bringing back the Scottish constitutional convention so we could resolve some of these issues—wouldn’t that be a bundle of fun, with 50-odd Scottish MPs on that particular body?

The claim of right states:

“We, gathered as the Scottish Constitutional Convention, do hereby acknowledge the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of Government”.

The Scottish people have determined their own form of government. They determined to vote in 1997 for a Labour Government who promised to bring a referendum on a Scottish Parliament. They voted overwhelmingly to deliver that Scottish Parliament with tax-raising powers in the yes-yes vote. In the ballot box since then, they have delivered their sovereign will in choosing what they want to be achieved in terms of Governments and what they want to happen. Interestingly, they also do this at the ballot box for local government elections and lots of other elections.

I get so frustrated about these kinds of debates because it is about the sovereign will of the Scottish people for the Scottish National party, but only when it suits. The sovereign will of the Scottish people was to deliver a Scottish Parliament and stay in the United Kingdom. It was also the sovereign will of the Scottish people to deliver a Scottish Parliament where the Scottish National party does not have a majority, and that Scottish Parliament—if it is the sovereign will of the Scottish people—has over the last few years voted against the Government on fracking, cuts to the national health service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, council funding, the Offensive Behaviour at Football and Threatening Communications (Scotland) Act 2012, failing educational standards and local government cuts. And what has the sovereign will of the Scottish people received in return? Nothing from the Scottish Parliament—disregard the Scottish parliamentary votes: these did not happen; turn the other way; do not implement the will of the Scottish Parliament, which is the will of the Scottish people.

Let me say why it is frustrating that it is about the sovereign will of the Scottish people only when it suits the SNP. Look at local government: it has been completely and utterly diminished, demoralised and demolished by significant cuts from the Scottish Government, who have passed on 9% or 10% grant cuts from this place and doubled and trebled them for local government.

Stephen Kerr: Does the hon. Gentleman also agree that the 11 years of the SNP Government of Edinburgh has created a highly centralised state? The power grab that has gone on in Scotland is a grab to the centre by the SNP Government.

Ian Murray: I am glad to have taken that intervention, because it goes to the point—[Interruption.] People can start shouting, “Better Together!”, but I am going to stand up for the people of Scotland and my constituency, because I disagree fundamentally with what the leader of the SNP, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford), said during his speech. He does not speak for the people of Scotland. We are entitled to have a different viewpoint. The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) is right, because this Chamber, when the Scotland Act 2016 was given its Third Reading and Royal Assent, delivered one of the most powerful Parliaments in the world, but it is the most centralist Parliament in the world. Local government no longer exists in Scotland. It is merely an administrative arm of the Scottish Government.

Let me turn to what the sovereign will of the Scottish people is actually delivering. Again, that only suits the SNP when it suits its case. The SNP refused to back a people’s vote in a referendum on the final deal from the European Union. There will be lots of different views across this Chamber—in fact, there are lots of different views among Labour Members about whether we should have a people’s vote. However, the principle for me is that, if we believe in the sovereign will of the Scottish people, why not back an additional vote for the Scottish people and people across the UK to decide on the final Brexit deal that the UK Government bring back, and then let the sovereign will of the Scottish people decide? No. The SNP reluctantly judges it and says, “Maybe we would back it, maybe we won’t, but only if independence is on the table as part of it.” It is only the sovereign will of the Scottish people when it suits.

I simply say, on the sovereign will of the Scottish people and the convention, that it is written down. It is being delivered. It has been delivered and everything
that will be delivered in the future, in terms of the sovereign will of the Scottish people, will happen at the ballot box when the people of Scotland go to vote. That is exactly what they have done. Before SNP Members start jumping up and down and saying, “What about the Brexit referendum?”, the rules of the game are as follows. There was a UK-wide referendum. People voted to leave. We are part of the United Kingdom. I hope that we do not leave. I always say, “If we leave the European Union”—I will do everything in my power to try to stop it, and if I cannot stop it, I will do everything in my power to try to soften it, but we are where we are. We cannot pick and choose votes when it suits us to pick and choose.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is making a strong point about the EU referendum. Does he recognise that it was based on the total number of votes across the United Kingdom, not on geography? So had the SNP joined Britain Stronger in Europe and proactively campaigned for remain, we could have got those few extra votes and kept us in. [HON. MEMBERS: “We did!”] Not as part of Britain Stronger in Europe.

Ian Murray: I am sorry but I am not going to dance to the hon. Gentleman’s tune, because the Conservative party’s attitude towards Scotland at the moment is just as big a threat to the UK. It pushed through a referendum on Brexit, with the former Prime Minister betting everything on winning but losing. The attitude of the Scottish Conservatives is as big a threat to the Union at the moment. They are pushing through a hard Brexit as lobby fodder for the Prime Minister, rather than fighting for the interests of their own constituents. [Interruption.] I am happy for him to gesticulate and say, “Keep attacking the SNP,” but Government Members are just as bad on the sovereign will of the Scottish people as expressed at the ballot box. We were promised that Ruth Davidson would send Scottish Conservative MPs down to this Chamber to fight for the interests of Scotland, and not once has any of them taken a different view from the Chief Whip and the Prime Minister. So when Brexit happens and goes badly, you 12 will own it as much as the Prime Minister—sorry, the hon. Gentlemen will own it. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, will not own Brexit, because it will be owned primarily by the Scottish Conservatives.

On the theme of it being the sovereign will of the Scottish people only when it suits, I will finish with this. As we discussed, the SNP did not participate in this process, and they had no intention of ever participating in this process, regardless of the warm words we hear now, but now they grab on to this claim of right and keep us in. [HON. MEMBERS: “We did!”] Not as part of Britain Stronger in Europe.

I think we lose the whole point of this place in some of our debates. It has been said by many Members across the House that we should be talking about the material issues, such as expenditure in Scotland, which we discussed last night in a debate that only two SNP MPs turned up for, or fishing, as others have said, but we are not; instead, we are back to the same old broken record from the SNP. What is really important is the original purpose of this Parliament: the unity of the United Kingdom that started with the vision of a Scottish king and was established in an Act of Union that abolished both the English and the Scottish Parliament and constituted this place, a United Kingdom Parliament where Members from across the entire country work together, pool their resources and make laws together for the benefit of people across the United Kingdom.

As the hundreds of years have passed, we have adapted. We saw that more powers had to be devolved. We have seen that power needs to be closer to the people who every day use the public services and goods being provided. It is disingenuous of SNP Members to say that somehow Scotland’s voice is not heard here. It is heard through their voices, through Conservative Members’ voices and through those of Liberal Democrat and Labour Members; it is heard right around this House—because this Parliament is Scotland’s Parliament as much as Holyrood is. That needs to be recognised.

My constituents need to stop being bullied by the SNP and pushed to make a choice between being Scottish and being British. They can be proud to be both, and they can have confidence in both their Parliaments to deliver their public services. I will take no lectures from the SNP about centralisation and ignoring the will of the people. A model diagram of centralisation is Edinburgh, where powers and moneys have been stripped away from our local councillors. We have record budget deficits in spite of underspends in the central Scottish budget, which in my constituency means music tuition being cut, health boards being stretched and public services suffering. And that is not because of Westminster; it is because of the Scottish National party. In fact, it should change its name. It is not the Scottish National party; it is the selfish National party. It has one reason for existing, and that is separation and division.

We are the Conservative and Unionist party. We have delivered on devolution, as we always promised, and we have stood up in this Chamber and challenged our own Ministers, as other Members have, on issues such as the EU to make sure we get the right deal on EU citizens, for example, or on the economic trade deal—and we will see how that comes out in October.

When we talk about devolution, we have to look at virtually every single policy area that has been devolved. After 20 years of devolution and 11 years of SNP management, every core area is underperforming. In education, we have gone from first to third in the United Kingdom, yet schools are still cascading through international rankings. In health, even after 20 years of devolution, we still have the lowest life expectancy in the United Kingdom.

Joanna Cherry: Does the hon. Gentleman accept the verdict of the BBC that Scotland under an SNP Government has the best-performing NHS in the United Kingdom?

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): I will try to keep my points succinct tonight.
by both parties throughout the UK to our individual constituents, but also to those in the rest of the United Kingdom.

There has been talk of hope. SNP Members have said, “What exactly could we be if Scotland were free of this horrific United Kingdom? We would be able to achieve so much more without it.” I remind them that it is this place that delivers on hope. It is this place that established the national health service—the national health service that SNP Members now stand up and try to criticise, or indeed champion, was set up in this Chamber. [Interruption.] I am talking about this Chamber. We can debate whether things happened or not, but it is the output that matters.

We established the NHS in this Chamber. We established the welfare state in this Chamber. And, as we heard from another Secretary of State today, we are delivering international aid by pooling our resources—Scots, English, Welsh, northern Irish and everyone else. We are delivering for other countries around the world, and that is all through this Chamber. I will no longer sit here and listen to SNP Members do down the United Kingdom—do down Scotland’s Parliament—and say that we do not have a place in it. We do. We are here, and so are the Opposition, and we are here to represent our constituents and make sure that we pull together and contribute.

**Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP):** Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that the legislation he is talking about was voted in in the 1940s here because there was not a Scottish Parliament, and there was not a Scottish Parliament because the Conservatives consistently voted against home rule?

**Luke Graham:** Perhaps I need to go back to the history lesson I gave at the beginning of this speech. There was not a Scottish Parliament because a Scottish king decided to unify the Crowns to make one United Kingdom, and then a voluntary Act of Union abolished both Scottish and English Parliaments and made this place. [Interruption.] Sorry, that is the historical fact.

We established the NHS in this Chamber. We established the welfare state in this Chamber. We are a unitary state with, under our current constitution, Westminster as the sovereign Parliament of the United Kingdom. That is why we have directly elected Members to this Parliament and that is why there are such hotly contested debates around the time of a general election in Scotland—because people know how important it is. They know they are sending Members to Westminster; they know the influence they will have; and they know the difference they can make. The hon. Gentleman must not do down Scotland’s Parliament—and say that we do not have a place in it. We do. We are here, and so are the Opposition, and we are here to represent our constituents and make sure that we pull together and contribute

We are looking at a 21st century world: we are racked with challenges from climate change to technological developments to international fracture from various countries all around the world. Would it not be great if somehow we could look to a place that would bring neighbours together, enable us to pool our resources, decide how to advance our NHS and our welfare, make sure we get £20 billion extra for the NHS, and make sure we forward the cause of science and international diplomacy and international aid? We have it: it is this Parliament; it is this United Kingdom. That is what we have been sent here to represent, and that is what we will continue to fight for on this side of the House.
and regaining of the sovereignty of the nation of Scotland, is now being dragged out of the family of European nations.

In looking at the critical facts relating to centralisation and Scotland, and to the historical narrative, Members who have not been in local government in Scotland should be reminded that the last reform of local government in Scotland was of course led by the Government of the United Kingdom, when they rearranged the local governance of Scotland. The Government of Scotland was established through the devolved settlement, and it was the present Scottish Government that set out the concordat and the existing relationships with local government, supported the length and breadth of Scottish local government through COSLA. For those Members who do not know what COSLA means, it is the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

I am not going to take up any more time, except to mention a basic principle. This place, no matter how much Members love it, should never seek to limit those constitutional realities, whether they agree with them or not. This place must clearly understand that, no matter what is said or done, Scotland is, today and forever, a nation—a distinct, proud, historic nation, free and able to direct its governance and destiny.

7.48 pm

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I have enjoyed the debate this evening very much indeed, particularly the scholarly dissertation given by the hon. Member for West Dunbartonshire (Martin Docherty-Hughes). The subject tonight is the claim of right for Scotland, and let me put it on record right away that I stand full square with the claim of right. I may be many things, and they say that pride is one of the seven deadly sins, but I take pride in my involvement in Scottish affairs over the years. I am one of six Members in this place who has also served in Holyrood. I had the honour to represent Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross for 12 years in Holyrood, and it was the making of my life. I look back on those days with pleasure and as something I can tell my children and grandchildren about in the years to come. I hate to talk about pride, but I am proud of that.

Let me give the House an example. In my garden, I have a big piece of Kemnay granite, which is one of the types of stone that the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood is built from. When the building was completed, the builders very kindly gave me one leftover piece of Kemnay granite and it now stands in my garden. I was involved in building the physical structure of the Scottish Parliament, as the Secretary of State will recall, along with Linda Fabiani, who is now Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, and John Home Robertson, who once graced the Labour Benches in this place. It was not an easy task. We had the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune coming at us all the time, which made us good friends, but I take pride in the fact that the building is our Parliament in Scotland, and I think they do as well.

I also served on the Scottish Constitutional Convention, of which mention has already been made this evening. As one of the local authority reps on the convention, I represented what was then Ross and Cromarty District Council. Believe it or not when looking at this aged frame, I was the youngest member from the highlands—a callow youth—but I feel that I made my contribution nevertheless.
Against that background, I turn again to the subject before us: the claim of right. While I have enjoyed the contributions of the SNP Members on the Benches in front of me, I cannot help but wonder why the claim is being used as the peg on which to hang today’s hat, because that gives me some trouble. Earlier on, mention was made of the fact that the SNP would not sign up to the constitutional convention, which involved difficult times, and on getting the scheme for the Scottish Parliament together, I greatly regret that the SNP did not take part. I must remind Members that there were times when Alex Salmond, a former Member of this place, was not unknown to make disparaging comments about the work of the constitutional convention, and I also regret that.

The inevitable logical follow-on from all that was that the SNP did not sign the claim of right. To me, the claim of right is one of the most important documents in recent Scottish history. The Chamber will not know this, but—I have already talked about my pride—my greatest pride is in the fact that my name is on that claim of right. No other Member of this place can say that, but I can, and I am not going to give away my pride in that fact for anything. I am therefore saddened that the claim of right, a document with which I am associated and in which the people of Scotland and I take great pride, is being used for the purposes of this debate. I say with respect to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) that it demeans him and cheapens the tone of the debate, and I wish it were not so. I will leave my contribution there.

7.52 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is quite useful for me to follow the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone), who is a figure of authority in the parliamentary Scottish National party, confirm that it is not the intention of the SNP in government in Scotland to move our country to an illegal referendum, that this debate is not an excuse and that the SNP is not looking to create a pretext for an illegal referendum?

Patrick Grady: The fact is that the Scottish Parliament was re-elected in 2016 and a new Scottish Government were formed with a mandate to reserve the right to request an independence referendum if there is a material change in circumstances. That request was made. A request for a section 30 order was agreed by a majority of Members of the Scottish Parliament, and that request is extant—it is still there. The First Minister said the request had been put on pause as a result of the 2017 UK general election, but the result of that general election was to return a majority of Members from Scotland who support independence and who, at the very least, support the right of the people of Scotland to choose.

Something interesting has happened in this debate, because the Secretary of State for Scotland and his Conservative colleagues have said, with a shrug of the shoulders, “Of course we accept this motion,” as if it is not that big a deal. In 2012, Ruth Davidson and her Conservative colleagues were the only party actively to vote against the claim of right for Scotland when it was put to the Scottish Parliament. Although we hear from Liberal Democrat Members that the SNP did not sign
the claim of right in 1989, for reasons that are well rehearsed, it was endorsed by Scotland’s Parliament in 2012 and the Scottish Conservatives actively refused to sign it at that point.

David Mundell rose—

Patrick Grady: If the Secretary of State will tell me what has changed and why the Conservative party is now prepared to assent to the claim of right, I will be happy to take an intervention.

David Mundell: I will just set out the evidence that it is always a matter of grievance. The grievance now is that we are supporting their motion. If we had not supported the motion, that would have been the grievance. This is not about the claim of right; it is about building grievance so they can build their case for independence.

Patrick Grady: As the Government have committed to producing a statement within 30 days of an Opposition motion being carried, we will no doubt hear that the motion is not binding, and this and that and all the rest. The Government can decide whether they want to accept the motion but, if what the Secretary of State and his Conservative colleagues are saying is correct, this sovereign Parliament is going to accept the principle of the sovereignty of the people of Scotland.

I am surprised that some of the Brexiteers who want to take back control, the hon. Members for the 18th and 19th centuries, have not come along this evening to defend their cherished and beloved parliamentary sovereignty. Perhaps it is because they cannot. As we saw during the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, it is not this House that is taking back control; it is the Executive who are taking back control. The power grab is not simply the one from the Scottish Parliament; it is also the power grab from this House, with the statutory instruments, the delegated authority and the ministerial fiat—

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Diktat.

Patrick Grady: And diktat. This has been grabbed and taken by the content of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. That is the real power grab that is going on and it undermines the sovereignty not just of the people of Scotland, but of the Westminster Parliament as it has been traditionally seen. We have heard from all these different Members asking why the SNP has not shown in this House is not ideal, because we make no special claim to the claim—

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to point out, for the record, that I did speak in that debate yesterday—I made an intervention.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The point of order should be addressed to me. I will respond again by saying that the hon. Gentleman has put what happened on the record and made it very clear. I will also say that the debate is coming to a close and other people wish to speak, so I urge Members not to have endless points of order.

Patrick Grady: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. They come here and complain that we want to talk about process and that we are obsessed with individual constitutional issues, and then that is what we get.

When the Scottish Parliament debated and adopted the claim of right in 2012, it did not endorse, and it was not being asked to endorse, the principle of independence; it was asked to acknowledge the principle of deciding on independence. So the claim of right is not just an historical document, a scholarly debating point or an “obscure document”, as the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) said; it is a fundamental principle on which our democracy rests. The UK Government, in accepting this tonight, are making a serious and important point about maintaining the Union as a partnership of equals—they need to understand that.

In closing, we, and this Tory Government in particular, should reflect on the famous words of the convener of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, Canon Kenyon Wright, who said at the opening of the convention:

“What if that other voice we all know so well responds by saying, ‘We say no, and we are the state’? Well, we say yes—and we are the people.”

Several hon. Members rose—
Madam Deputy Speaker: I am afraid I am going to have now to impose a six-minute time limit.

8.4 pm

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I am delighted to speak in this debate on the claim of right for Scotland, which asserts the sovereignty of the Scottish people, declaring their right to determine the form of government that best suits their needs. This is a timely debate, although I know some people in the Chamber have questioned why we are debating this issue. This debate could not be more timely, because we need to do all we can to ensure that the wishes of the people of Scotland are respected. Twenty years into devolution, the Scottish Parliament’s powers are under threat from a power grab by the party that fought tooth and nail against the very establishment of that Parliament and has never fully got behind it or truly believed in it.

I am not going to talk about independence, because the Tories and the Labour party have talked about nothing else—and they accuse us of being obsessed. They can talk about independence, as they do incessantly, but I remind them that in 2016 the SNP Government got a mandate to hold a referendum, given the material change in circumstances. If they are so concerned about the will of the people, perhaps they should reflect on that.

We had a referendum in Scotland on EU membership, but there was no evidence that the people of Scotland wanted one. We in Scotland voted to remain in the EU by a very convincing majority, and we are now being removed against our will from a family of nations of which we wish to remain a part. We have been told by Government Members that we should wait to see how Brexit unfolds. Let us look at how Brexit is unfolding.

The Chancellor disagrees with the Foreign Secretary; the Foreign Secretary disagrees with the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister disagrees with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; the Secretary of State for International Trade has his head stuck firmly in the sand and says it is all going well and there is nothing to see here, so just move along; and the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union does not seem to know how final the final deal on Brexit will be. All that is before we even get to this week’s antics, in which the hon. Member for North Dorset (Simon Hoare) was involved. Members think that we should wait to see how Brexit is unfolding; I think we should buy some popcorn, if it were not so serious.

We have heard the Secretary of State unable, or perhaps unwilling, to explain why the Tories are now to explain why they ride roughshod over democratic institutions elected by the people of Scotland—remember, the Tories have not won an election in Scotland for 55 years—and when they ride roughshod over the Scottish people and their will, they do so at their peril.

We have heard about the affect for the Scottish Parliament and the esteem in which it is held; Westminster enjoys no such reputation in Scotland. We have repeatedly heard the powers that are being clawed back by this Government being diminished, but Government Members know exactly how important those powers are. They include agriculture, fisheries, food labelling and public procurement. I remind Government Members that the public are watching. The clawing back of powers over public procurement could constitute an attack on our public services. I have listened to MPs in the Tory ranks rubbing such concerns; their constituents will have something to say about that.

I know all this is inconvenient for those who oppose the very concept of devolution and who want to deny Scotland’s very nationhood. They wish us pesky Scots would stop using our voices to decry the injustices and acts of contempt being perpetrated on Scotland, but we will not go quietly. Tonight, we reassert the claim of right for Scotland, without apology, despite all the blistering attacks from Government Members. Scotland is watching. I say to Government Members: you are swimming against the tide of history and you will soon find yourselves engulfed in the waves.

8.9 pm

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to discuss this matter and to contribute to this debate. The concept of the claim of right dates back to the Claim of Right Act 1689, which referred then to the right of appeal to the sovereign and the monarch against perceived judicial injustice. The 1689 Act gave access to the then Parliament of Scotland where the monarch in Parliament sat. The Act of Union 1707 led to the abolition of the Parliament of Scotland and the right then transferred to the House of Lords, which is now, of course, the United Kingdom Supreme Court. The concept of that right was taken by the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989 to grant the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs. The idea itself dates back to the thinking of my predecessor, J. P. Mackintosh, an honourable Member of this House who died far too young, 40 years ago this month.

The claim of right draws on the principle of empowering communities, and it is a criticism only of Governments that they appear far too happy to accept new powers, but are very reluctant to pass them on downwards to their communities, to the local authorities and even lower.

The claim of right has developed into the devolution debate that we have heard today. Again, my predecessor, J. P. Mackintosh, shared with his great friend, Donald Dewar, a passionate commitment to the cause of Scottish devolution. As Donald Dewar said, articulating
Mackintosh’s view, devolution is, at its core, about democratic control. It is the empowering of people; it is not for the nationalistic glorification of the nation state. He said: “It was never Scotland right or wrong...it is about good government, an equitable democracy that borrows, elevates and creates opportunity for the citizen.”

It is the idea of a union state made stronger by the diversity of its communities and constituent parts rather than creeping uniformity. The shouts of, “Conform! Conform!”, implying that it should all be put in a meat mincer so that it all looks the same, should be battled against.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on that very important point. Is not the reality in practice that this Parliament, far from being at odds with the principles of the claim of right, has actually energised and activated the claim of right by repeatedly using the practice of devolving powers down through numerous examples over the past 50 years from the European economic area to the devolution referendums of recent years?

Martin Whitfield: I am grateful for that intervention. It is right to say that powers have gone down, but, too often, powers stick in one place instead of being handed down. We can look at the crisis in our local authorities in Scotland where they have had powers taken back into centralised government.

We stand here today between a party whose sole aim is a nationalistic independence of flag waving and shouting and a party which, with all respect, failed to see the true potential of devolution. I am talking about the goal of a stronger, kinder Union, a fairer Union in which our communities have a stake not just in the results of a decision but also in the decision-making power. We live in a time of world challenges. A choice was made to stand differently from Europe. It is a decision that saddens me, but it is one that I respect. None the less, we must still stand as part of Europe. The claim of right does not underpin a set type of governance; it is a reality that the form of governance should be influenced by and borrowed from, and it should elevate and create opportunities for the citizens who sign up to it. These words by J. P. Mackintosh stand in testament to the fluid ideas that underpin the demands of a citizen:

“It is not beyond the wit of man to devise institutions to meet these demands.”

8.13 pm

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Earlier in this debate, I intervened on the Secretary of State for Scotland to ask him whether he supported the principle of self-determination in article 1 of the charter of the United Nations, and I was very pleased that he said that he did. For those who need reminding, this is what article 1 says:

“All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

We have this motion today because of what has occurred since the people of Scotland last voted in relation to their self-determination, which was in 2014, because the implications of Brexit for Scotland’s economic, social and cultural development are enormous. That is why we wish to reassert today the right of the Scottish people to self-determination.

It has been very pleasing that there have been a number of significant concessions from other parties during this debate. The hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) said that he accepts the sovereignty of the Scottish people. I am sure that that may come as a surprise to some of his colleagues from English constituencies who are not here this evening and who so often tell us that it is this Parliament and this Parliament alone that is sovereign, but he has made that concession so that is one concession from the Government Benches.

Douglas Ross: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: I will take an intervention in a moment.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) has said that he will vote for this motion tonight. I was delighted to hear that and I very much hope that all his colleagues will go through the Lobby to vote for the motion. The support for this principle will become very important when the First Minister of Scotland once again approaches the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom looking for a section 30 order.

The hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Lesley Laird), who speaks for the official Opposition, also made an important concession, if I heard her correctly. I think that she said that if there was a mandate for another independence referendum in Scotland, she would support it. Well, that is very good. In fact, it is music to my ears because there is already a mandate for another independence referendum in Scotland. It comes from the democratically elected Scottish Parliament in which, in the light of the Brexit vote, the SNP and the Greens together voted to give the First Minister of Scotland a mandate—[Interruption.] Let me finish my point. The SNP and the Greens voted to give the First Minister of Scotland a mandate to request from this Government a section 30 order to hold another independence referendum. If Government Members and Labour Members have not twigged already, let me spell it out for them: that is what this motion is about tonight. It is about protecting the right of the Scottish people to take necessary steps to protect themselves from the consequences of Brexit because, unlike the people’s vote, the vote for a second independence referendum in Scotland already has a mandate. That is a distinction that the hon. Member for Edinburgh South (Ian Murray) and the Lib Dems, who are no longer in their place, do not seem to understand.

Before I go any further, I want to take this opportunity to defend our group leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford). There has been a concerted attempt by Conservative Members this evening to assassinate his character by putting into Hansard allegations about him that cannot be upheld. Madam Deputy Speaker, I note that neither you, nor anyone else in the Chair this evening, has ruled his conduct disorderly. In speaking up passionately for the viewpoint of the Scottish National party, he is simply exercising his mandate and doing his job. In so doing, he has our support, the support of his constituents and the support of the Scottish National party.

Douglas Ross: The hon. and learned Lady mentioned what Conservative Members had said and put into
**Hansard.** Will she accept that what I said about the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber was not made it all too personal—that he was playing the man, rather than the ball—and that if SNP Members really want to have a constitutional debate in which they engage people from all sides, they have to stop these petty attacks on individuals?

**Joanna Cherry:** Yes, I did hear the hon. Gentleman say that, but I do not accept that he was right. I suggest that he gets a mirror and looks in it more often, because it is he and his colleagues from Scotland who have been playing the man, not the ball.

This debate—as well as the debate around Brexit and Scottish independence—is really about what it means to be an independent nation in the modern world. People often ask why the Scottish National party wants to leave the United Kingdom but stay in the European Union. The answer is very simple. We do not have to look very far to see an example of what it is to be a partner in the European Union, as opposed to what it is to be a member nation in the UK. Just look across the Irish sea to Ireland, and see the treatment that the Republic of Ireland has received from the European Union. Ireland’s economic and social considerations are put at the heart of the negotiations by the EU27. Contrast that with the economic and social concerns of Scotland and, indeed, Northern Ireland, which both voted to remain but whose concerns are utterly sidelined. In Scotland’s case, we were given a total of 19 minutes to debate amendments to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, accompanied by much sneering and condescension from the Government Benches when SNP MPs dared to protest. I would say to Conservative Members that their sneering and condescension is not a good look.

**Simon Hoare rose—**

**Joanna Cherry:** No, I will not give way—I want to develop my point.

I ask Conservative Members to reflect on the impression that their behaviour is likely to have on voters in Scotland when, as seems likely—for the reasons admirably adumbrated by my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson)—the current Tory Government collapse under the weight of their own divisions and are forced to go to the country again in another general election. I suggest to Conservative Members that their role as Lobby fodder, and the way in which they have sneered and condescended when SNP Members have attempted to protest about the lack of time given in this Chamber to the impact of Brexit on devolution, will not serve them well.

The disparity between the treatment of the Republic of Ireland within the European Union and the treatment of Scotland within the United Kingdom illustrates very clearly why I and my colleagues and wish to leave the Union of the UK but remain within the European Union.

**Bill Grant rose—**

The motion asks us to endorse the principles of the claim of right as it was endorsed in 1989. I just wonder if any SNP Members could remind us how many members of the SNP signed the claim of right in 1989. In fact, only two parties did not sign the claim of right—the actual Tories and the tartan Tories. If SNP Members wanted to demonstrate their commitment to standing up for Scotland, they should have chosen another topic, because their record on this issue is not strong.

The House will be interested to know that the claim of right was signed in 1989 by all Labour MPs, with the exception of Tam Dalyell. The Tories did not sign up to the Scottish constitutional convention or the claim of right because they were opposed to devolution, and the SNP did not sign up to the Scottish Constitutional Convention or the claim of right because independence was not considered.
The people of Scotland are tired of constitutional debates. They want the Governments here and in Holyrood to work together. A Labour-led Government in Scotland and in Westminster will do that. I welcome the opportunity to remind the House of my belief in the people of Scotland and my passion for representing and standing up for them. That means focusing on jobs, welfare and Europe and ensuring that the people of Scotland do not pay the price for the Tories in London and the SNP in Scotland.

8.25 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I find it rather interesting that, in the course of a debate of almost three hours, we have not heard anyone speak against the notion of the claim of right. However, I caution colleagues against being deluded by any faux agreement on this matter, because I am confident that many Members who are not in the Chamber tonight would find it presumptuous that a group of citizens in one part of this island should assert the claim to be able to control their own destiny. They would do that because they regard this as a single nation, and they regard the people of Scotland, while important, as having no other rights than the people of the west midlands or East Anglia.

I am pleased that most contributors to the debate have realised that the basis of our constitution is different from that. We may have a single polity, but we have a multinational country that is based on serial Acts of Union that bring its component parts together. Once we understand that, the claim of right has to be the intellectual corollary of that position. A Union can be maintained only by consent, and if the people of Scotland do not give their consent to maintaining it, it will naturally fall.

The idea of popular sovereignty for the people of Scotland is quite old fashioned. In two years, we will celebrate the 700th anniversary of the declaration of Arbroath, and that document is worth looking at. It was in fact a letter from the nobles of Scotland to the Pope to ask him to intervene. Much of the language was in fact a letter from the nobles of Scotland to the Pope to ask him to intervene. Much of the language is archaic, and much of it is reverential, but in that document the idea of something that was never before expressed. It says clearly that if the King of Scotland does not represent the wishes of the people, the people will find themselves a King who will. It is the first expression in modern times of the notion of popular sovereignty.

That idea has ebbed and flowed over the seven centuries in between. Three hundred years ago, it inspired the dissenters who were resisting the fledgling Union because they felt it was a matter of being sold out by the Scottish aristocracy. Two hundred years ago, it fuelled the friendly societies and people such as Thomas Muir who were working for popular democracy and universal franchise. One hundred years ago, it motivated the Red Clydesiders and people such as John Maclean. The idea of Scottish popular sovereignty has been consistent throughout the centuries, but never more so than the present day, and never more so than 20 years ago, when the Scotland Act 1998, for the first time in all those centuries, actually asked the people what form of government they would like. A massive majority of them—three quarters—voted to establish the Scottish Parliament.

We are having this debate about the claim of right for Scotland because we believe that the devolution settlement is very much under threat, and we wish to alert the House and the country to what is going on. The Secretary of State for Scotland says that there is no power grab, but in fact a powers bonanza. In a previous debate, the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) listed a whole range of things that would become the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament after Brexit. However, we misunderstand if we think that responsibility is the same as power. At the same time as those areas of responsibility are being transferred to the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Parliament’s ability to do anything about them is being limited and constrained like never before. It is intended that so many areas—not just the ones transferring from Brussels, but those that are currently the exclusive competence of the Scottish Parliament—will in future be subject to UK-wide frameworks.

We do not yet have an idea—I see that today’s fisheries White Paper does not have an idea—of exactly how those frameworks will work. We have so far been talking about the principle, but it is the principle that is important. If we picture a UK-wide committee to talk about fishing policy, the interests of Scottish fishermen would be represented by the Scottish Government, and likewise for the Welsh and Northern Irish, but who will speak for the fishermen of England? That will be the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—a Department in Westminster. At the same time, if there is a divergence of opinion or a difference of view, DEFRA will determine what actually happens. That is not a partnership; it means that the devolved Administrations will be subject to and subservient to the will of the majority. The Secretary of State may say that Scotland is part of the UK, but I tell him that Scotland is not part of England, although that is in effect what such an arrangement would lead to.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I would like to take issue with the hon. Gentleman’s statement about Scotland not being part of England, given that in fact Scotland has never been—certainly in the life of this Parliament—part of England, and that was not what the Secretary of State said.

Tommy Sheppard: I think that the hon. Gentleman might have prepared that better. The point I was making is that, in effect, such an arrangement will make Scotland—and Wales and Northern Ireland for that matter—subservient to the will of the Government in this place, which is contrary to the whole spirit of devolution.

Twenty years ago, when the architects of devolution—Donald Dewar in this place, and John Sewel in the other—were framing the proposals, they understood the need to try to make sure that the process was seen as a genuine commitment to the decentralisation of political power. They therefore enshrined a principle saying that if matters were devolved to the Scottish Parliament, this place would not interfere in those matters and would not determine anything about them without the consent of the Scottish Parliament. That principle has stood for 20 years and has not been challenged across the House. Yet, last week, we made history, because for the first time, a United Kingdom piece of legislation that required the consent of the Scottish Parliament was made law although that consent was not given. That is a problem for everyone and it will have to be addressed.
Luke Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tommy Sheppard: I fear we are running out of time, so I will not take the hon. Gentleman’s intervention.

Many Members have talked about the 2014 referendum and the idea—my leader expressed this so well in his opening remarks—that for those 15 hours on 18 September 2014, sovereignty was genuinely in the hands of the people of Scotland. They had a choice to make between two alternative futures, and they chose one. I did not agree with the choice that they made, but I fully respect it—I respect it completely as a decision that they took. However, I tell the House that in the same way that a dog is not only for Christmas, sovereignty is not only for 18 September 2014. Sovereignty means having the ability to change your mind if circumstances change—the ability to adapt and take a new view.

The shadow Secretary of State asked us to imagine a situation—my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) commented on this—where a Scottish Parliament was elected in which a majority of its Members had stood on a manifesto suggesting that the people should be consulted in a referendum. She suggested that if the majority voted for that to become the policy of the Scottish Parliament, it would be inappropriate for this Parliament to stand in its way. That was the hon. Lady’s suggestion, and I agree with it. The problem is that this is not a matter of hypothesis for the future; this is real, because that was exactly what happened in the Scottish general election 26 months ago, when a mandate was sought and a mandate was given.

As others have said, that mandate is extant, but it will be for the judgment of the Scottish Parliament to determine, when the dust settles on this Brexit mess we are currently in, whether it believes that it is in the best interests of the people of Scotland that they be consulted again on their constitutional future and on whether they wish to remain part of an isolationist United Kingdom or to be part of opening up to the world and playing their role as an independent country. That day will come, and the claim of right for Scotland means that the people will have the right to exercise their decision on that matter when that time comes.

8.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): May I begin by referring to the hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney), who rightly mentioned the sad death of his constituent, Alesha MacPhail? It is right that we all agree with the choice that they made, but I fully respect it—I respect it completely as a decision that they took. However, I tell the House that in the same way that a dog is not only for Christmas, sovereignty is not only for 18 September 2014. Sovereignty means having the ability to change your mind if circumstances change—the ability to adapt and take a new view.

The shadow Secretary of State asked us to imagine a situation—my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) commented on this—where a Scottish Parliament was elected in which a majority of its Members had stood on a manifesto suggesting that the people should be consulted in a referendum. She suggested that if the majority voted for that to become the policy of the Scottish Parliament, it would be inappropriate for this Parliament to stand in its way. That was the hon. Lady’s suggestion, and I agree with it. The problem is that this is not a matter of hypothesis for the future; this is real, because that was exactly what happened in the Scottish general election 26 months ago, when a mandate was sought and a mandate was given.

As others have said, that mandate is extant, but it will be for the judgment of the Scottish Parliament to determine, when the dust settles on this Brexit mess we are currently in, whether it believes that it is in the best interests of the people of Scotland that they be consulted again on their constitutional future and on whether they wish to remain part of an isolationist United Kingdom or to be part of opening up to the world and playing their role as an independent country. That day will come, and the claim of right for Scotland means that the people will have the right to exercise their decision on that matter when that time comes.

It is no surprise that we are not debating that issue, however, because SNP Members refused to support the proposal. It did so not because that is not good for Scotland—they agree that it is—but because they believed that that stance would be good for the Scottish nationalist party. That, I am afraid, is this debate in a nutshell. It is not about what is right for Scotland; it is about what serves the self-interest of the Scottish National party.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Can the Minister name one route that was guaranteed by the UK Government to Heathrow in the national planning statement?

Stuart Andrew: As the hon. Gentleman knows, 15% of the routes are guaranteed for regional connectivity. He has turned down the opportunity for his country to have better connectivity to the rest of the UK and the rest of the world. He says that he wants to stand up for Scotland, but he should take part in the debates that happen here and vote in Divisions, rather than walking out, as he did at Prime Minister’s questions.

The claim of right was about devolution, and we support devolution. This Government have consistently supported devolution ever since it was backed by the people of Scotland in a referendum in 1997. It was the Scottish people who reaffirmed their support for devolution in the independence referendum of 2014. We have shown our support in the Scotland Act 2016, which transferred wide-ranging powers over tax, welfare and much more to Holyrood.

We continue to show our support for devolution as we prepare to leave the EU. Scores of powers previously held in Brussels will flow to the Scottish Parliament, and we are working with the Scottish Government to ensure that Scotland and the whole UK are ready. In doing so, we are listening to the people of Scotland. We respect the votes that they cast in 1997 and in 2014. We are respecting their rights, as expressed by the authors of the claim of right.

The truth is that SNP Members cannot bring themselves to show the same respect. They refused to sign the claim of right because it had nothing to do with their cause of independence. They saw devolution only as a stepping stone to independence, and they have shown themselves to be equally opportunistic when it comes to Brexit—[Interruption]—Brexit. Yes, breakfast, dinner and tea, as we say in the north.

Shamefully, SNP Members have no interest in preparing Scotland and the UK for leaving the EU. They see Brexit only as a chance to scaremonger and manufacture grievances in a bid to boost calls for independence. That is their purpose in holding today’s debate, but people will see it for what it is. They will see through the SNP’s games and they will understand that it is not acting in Scotland’s interest, but in its own narrow party interests.

Ian Blackford: Will the Minister give way?

Stuart Andrew: No, the right hon. Gentleman spoke for far too long at the beginning of the debate. In fact, I will come on to a point he made right at the very beginning of his speech. He let the cat out of the bag in the very first few sentences of his contribution when he almost lost his temper. It was clear that this is all about pushing for another Scottish independence referendum. He said that there was a majority for independence in
the Scottish Parliament, but the point is that there was a majority of the people of Scotland who voted no in the independence referendum.

The right hon. Gentleman said that we ripped up the Sewel convention. I really do not understand how he can say that. It does seem that the Scottish Government and some right hon. and hon. Members, when taking part in this debate, appear to have read “not normally”, which is written in the convention, to mean not at all, never, in no circumstances whatsoever. Some Members may wish to change the terms of the convention, but this is the convention that we have.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about this Government wanting to attack the poor. I find that a really quite disgraceful comment. We have done an enormous amount to turn the economy around. [Interruption.] He can continue to heckle, but I will come on to his behaviour in this debate in a moment. We have record employment. We have lowered taxes. We have taken the poorest out of tax altogether, and our national living wage has given the poorest people in this country the biggest increase in their wage for a long time.

The right hon. Gentleman said that we were all about a power grab and that the Secretary of State could not name a single power that would be going to the Scottish Parliament. I really do not understand that. In a previous debate, my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) spent about half his speech listing all the powers that will be going to Holyrood. In fact, due to the time limit on his speech, he did not have time to list them all.

**Douglas Ross:** Does the Minister also accept that, in a debate last week, not a single SNP MP could tell us any powers the Scottish Parliament was losing? Today, every time I tried to intervene on the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) about the power grab, he would not accept it because he knows Scotland is getting a huge number of powers from this Westminster Government as a result of Brexit.

**Stuart Andrew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is part of the process the SNP is trying to use. It is trying to create an image that the Government are trying to take powers away from Scotland when the fact is that, when those powers come from Brussels, when we leave the EU, we will transfer those powers to the Scottish Parliament. That is why Nicola Sturgeon herself had to increase the size of her Cabinet: because it has more responsibility. Those are not my words, but her words in answer to why we were increasing—

**Ian Blackford:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can I just clarify what has been going on here? Through the withdrawal Act, powers that are reserved under the Scotland Act are being taken back by Westminster. That is the reality and that is the fact. No powers are being gifted by Westminster. The Minister is simply wrong.

**Mr Speaker:** Unfortunately, the right hon. Gentleman’s point of order suffers from the grave disadvantage of not even approximating to or imitating a point of order. As the cheeky grin on the right hon. Gentleman’s face testifies, he knows. He was deprived when he sought to intervene and he therefore opted for the somewhat cheeky ruse of a bogus point of order, but he has made his point.

**Stuart Andrew:** Thank you, Mr Speaker.

I want to challenge the assertion made by various Members of the SNP to have Scottish nationalists that they have been sent down to representation. That is why Nicola Sturgeon herself is trying to create an image that the Government are trying to take powers away from Scotland when the fact is that, when those powers come from Brussels, when we leave the EU, we will transfer those powers to the Scottish Parliament. I really do not understand that. In a previous debate, not a single SNP MP could tell us any powers the Scottish Parliament was losing? Today, every time I tried to intervene on the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) about the power grab, he would not accept it because he knows Scotland is getting a huge number of powers from this Westminster Government as a result of Brexit.

**Joanna Cherry:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I hope that it is a point of order, not a point of frustration.

**Joanna Cherry:** Repeatedly this evening, Government Members have sought to suggest that my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) talked about the tone of this debate. I was surprised at the way interventions were rejected by the leader of the SNP, the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber. There are ways that we behave ourselves in this House. He talked about important issues about education and health—

**Patrick Grady:** claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).

**Question put forthwith.** That the Question be now put.

**Question agreed to.**

**Main Question accordingly put and agreed to.**

**Resolved.**

That this House endorses the principles of the Claim of Right for Scotland, agreed by the Scottish Constitutional Convention in 1989 and by the Scottish Parliament in 2012, and therefore acknowledges the sovereign right of the Scottish people to determine the form of government best suited to their needs.

**Mr Speaker:** I was genuinely sorry that the Under-Secretary of State for Wales, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), was not able to conclude his speech. I say that simply because he is the very embodiment of courtesy in the House, but I am afraid that is sometimes the way the cookie crumbles. No personal discourtesy is intended to the hon. Gentleman.
Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the draft West Midlands Combined Authority (Business Rate Supplements Functions and Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 7 June, be approved.—[Amanda Milling.]

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Closure of Sandfield House

8.46 pm

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Mental health services are a very important part of the provision in north Lincolnshire. I pay tribute to Catherine Lydon and others who have helped to pull this petition together of many hundreds of people locally, who are concerned about the closure of Sandfield House, which provides important and effective mental health services to local people.

The Petition states:

The petition of residents of North Lincolnshire, Declares that Rotherham, Doncaster and South Humber Mental Health NHS Foundation were given notice to cease operating at the site of Sandfield House by North Lincolnshire Council; and further notes that the closure of the community resource would affect more than 1000 people who are being treated there.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to intervene with North Lincolnshire Council to stop the closure of Sandfield House.

And the petitioners remain, etc. [P002167]

Mr Speaker: There are a number of petitions to be presented on home education: draft guidance and consultation. I hope that it will be of assistance to the House if I set out how we shall proceed. John Howell will present his petition in the usual way and bring it to the Clerk at the Table, who will read out the title. Subsequent Members should proceed directly to the petitions bag at the back of the Chair. I shall call the next Member immediately after the previous Member has finished speaking. I am advised, so I hope that this is correct—some people may be doing this for the first time; the Chair is your friendly assistant, here to help—that John Howell, Sir Oliver Heald, Laura Smith and Colleen Fletcher will read their petitions to the House in full. [Interruption.] The right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) looks positively horrified at the prospective denial of her opportunity to do expatiate. I was going to say, but I cannot be sure that things will turn out this way, that subsequent Members should give a brief description of the number and location of the petitioners and state that the petition is in the same terms. It is fairly obvious why I intend to proceed in this way—so that we can avoid an excessively protracted experience.

I call the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) to present his petition, to which I know the Whip on duty will be listening most attentively and with intense interest.

8.50 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I wish to present a petition on the subject of home education. The petition is from constituents of Henley. Also included in this mass petition are constituents of my hon. Friends the Members for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler) and for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), my right hon. Friends the Members for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Sir David Evennett), for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), my right hon. Friends the Members for Devizes (Claire Perry), the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Stephen Lloyd), the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh), the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford and South Herefordshire (Jesse Norman), the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), my hon. Friend the Members for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) and for Maidstone and The Weald (Mrs Grant), my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), my hon. Friends the Members for Newark (Robert Jenrick), for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), for Reading West (Alok Sharma) and for Rochester and Strood (Kelin Tothurst), my right hon. Friends the Members for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), my hon. and learned Friends the Members for South Swindon (Robert Buckland), my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Royston Smith), my right hon. Friends the Members for Staffordshire Moorlands (Karen Bradley), my hon. Friends the Members for Stone (Sir William Cash) and for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), my right hon. Friends the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) and my hon. Friends the Members for West Worcestershire (Harriet Baldwin), for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) and for Woking (Mr Lord).

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Henley constituency, Declares that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc. [P002166]

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The petition of residents of Letchworth garden city shares the same concerns as explained by my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). The petitioners are 24 in number.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Letchworth garden city, Declares that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable
complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom.
Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.] [P002168]

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I present this petition on behalf of home educators in my constituency who feel that there has been a failure to consult them as stakeholders in the creation of the new guidelines, going against Government policies on consultation.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Crewe and Nantwich constituency.
Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.] [P002170]

Colleen Fletcher (Coventry North East) (Lab): I rise to present a petition on behalf of Juliet, Larry and Jemma English, and many others from across my constituency, on home education. The petition relates to the signatories’ concerns about the Government’s consultation on draft guidance on elective home education. The crux of their concerns relates to the Government’s failure to include the home education community in the consultation process, the lack of safeguards for parents who home-educate their children, and the imposition of officious regulation on home educators.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Coventry North East constituency.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.] [P002169]

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I rise to present a petition with the same title. It has 42 signatures from Clacton constituents.

The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:
[The petition of residents of Clacton.
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further
Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is with pleasure that I rise to present a petition from residents of Chesham and Amersham, following in the footsteps of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell). Home-educating parents play a very important role in our education system. They deserve to be consulted, and they deserve to have an input in the home education that is so important throughout this United Kingdom. The wording of the petition is the same as the wording of the petition presented by my hon. Friend.

Following is the full text of the petition:

The petition of residents of Chesham and Amersham, Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

Mr Speaker: Thank you. That was a very brief oration from a distinguished Dame.

Craig Mackinlay (South Thanet) (Con): I rise to present a petition in very similar terms, on behalf of my constituents. It has been signed by 75 people with similar concerns about local authorities and consultation. It states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.
NHS Complaints System: Wales

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about something that has been on my mind for a long time.

It is nearly six years since the death of my husband. Some Members will know that he spent his last two weeks on the respiratory ward at the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff. He was admitted on Tuesday 9 October 2012 to what should have been a caring and safe place. Instead, what we found was the opposite. I left Owen in what I thought was a place of safety, thinking that the hospital could care for him better than we could at home. How wrong I was. Owen went into the hospital mobile, yet spent two weeks crammed in a bed, on a cold, uncaring ward.

Despite the poor care that Owen received, his condition initially settled. In fact, there were provisional plans for him to come home towards the middle of the second week. Sadly, his condition took a turn for the worse. In the early hours of Monday 22 October, I was advised that there was no reasonable chance of his surviving. The battle began: the battle to find out what had happened to him and why.

Many Members will have heard of my concerns regarding the 27 hours he spent on a trolley in the A&E department. A later inquiry identified a number of nursing deficiencies. Sadly, my efforts to obtain information from the board of UHW were employees of the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The chair was the deputy nursing director, Mandy Rayani. The board’s investigation failed to comment on the medical deficiencies that I have mentioned, but it very quickly acknowledged my “adverse perception” of what happened.

Most of my claims of poor care were denied. Of the 31 concerns that I raised, 21 were rejected. This was despite the fact that a few weeks after my husband’s death systems of junior doctors means reduced hours. This means that over a weekend a patient may be seen by half a dozen different doctors, all working for the same firm.

Since continuing my inquiries about Owen’s care, I have learned a number of medical terms. I now know about a “low grade temperature” and that this may indicate that there is an infection somewhere, without the doctors being able to find out exactly where. I have also become familiar with the term “inflammatory markers”. Inflammatory markers are blood tests that indicate the presence of infection. When the clinical markers change, and in particular when they increase, it suggests that there is an infection somewhere that is not under control. I will refer to just two.

One is known as the CRP—the C-reactive protein. The normal CRP is less than 10; Owen’s CRP was 22 on admission. Now, 22 is not particularly high, but it suggests that there may be an infection somewhere. Eight days later Owen’s CRP had crept up to 41. The fact that it was increasing—“going the wrong way” as the medics would put it—indicated that he could have an infection that could be going out of control. Owen’s neutrophil count—the type of white blood cell that increases during an infection—was also “going the wrong way”. The normal is less than six. It was 8.7 on his admission. 

Mr Speaker: That is an extraordinary musical intervention on the right hon. Lady, but I am not sure it is up to her high intellectual standards—but the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has come to the rescue, being a selfless public servant as he is.

Mr Speaker: Excuse me, Mr Speaker, I am sorry, but that is my phone.

Ann Clwyd: The normal is less than six; it was 8.7 on Owen’s admission, and eight days later it was 10.6.

Doctors will tell us that they do not just look at the results of blood tests; they also look at the patient. In Owen’s case, they failed to look at the blood tests and they failed to look at the patient. Members will no doubt be surprised to hear that although Owen’s inflammatory markers had increased during his second week in hospital, this was not recorded in his clinical notes. The tests that noted the increase in CRP and the neutrophil count were done on the Friday. That was four days before his death from hospital-acquired pneumonia. No one saw the results. No one saw Owen. No doctor saw him on Saturday. No doctor saw him on Sunday. By Monday, it was too late. I think it is reasonable to assume that if Owen had received effective antibiotics when his inflammatory markers were increasing, he would have stood a fighting chance and would have survived that infection.

I continue to be shocked by the way the hospital board has dealt with my concerns. Members might have heard of so-called independent reports. There was nothing independent about this particular report. All the members were employees of the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board. The chair was the deputy nursing director, Mandy Rayani. The board’s investigation failed to comment on the medical deficiencies that I have mentioned, but it very quickly acknowledged my “adverse perception” of what happened.

Most of my claims of poor care were denied. Of the 31 concerns that I raised, 21 were rejected. This was despite the fact that a few weeks after my husband’s
death. Health Inspectorate Wales, the body that inspects Welsh hospitals, visited the ward where my husband had been a patient. While it was inspecting the ward, it noticed that senior nurses went off for their lunch leaving patients who needed assistance to eat without any help, that some patients were found without buzzers to call for assistance, and that individual care plans were not in place for the patients, yet my concerns were dismissed as my “adverse perception” by the deputy director of nursing, Mandy Rayani, in UHW’s so-called independent report.

I remain unhappy with the attitude of the health board. When Owen died, the chief executive was Adam Cairns. He has now left the country and is working in the middle east. When he left, I took my complaint up with other executives and I have found—as I did when I was writing my report for the Government on hospital complaints—that the culture of deny, delay and defend has continued.

I wrote to Maria Battle, the chair of the health board. I wanted to know why no one had spotted the abnormal blood results. I wanted to know why Owen’s low grade temperature did not appear to be of concern to anyone. The first meeting was postponed. We eventually met on 2 August last year. Despite my PA telephoning the board to ask for a copy of its response a week earlier, my medical colleague and I were not allowed to see the report until we arrived in the building for our meeting. I was astonished to hear Ruth Walker, the senior nurse, saying that she had taken it upon herself not to release the report prior to the meeting. I would have expected such a decision to be made by Maria Battle as chair of the board, by Dr Graham Shortland, the medical director, given that the matters mainly related to medical care, or by Dr Sharon Hopkins, who at that time was the acting chief executive.

I believe that the decision of the board to refuse to release this document beforehand reflects its dismissive, insulting and gratuitous attitude to members of the public and to the families of loved ones. It reflects the overall cover-up mentality that is all-pervasive in this health board.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing this debate and on the very personal and poignant way in which she has told the story of her husband’s last few days in hospital. Has she at any stage considered referred this matter to the medical ombudsman and asking them to investigate her complaint? Hopefully, they would come up with an answer that would satisfy her and perhaps give the Minister a way of taking this forward.

Ann Clwyd: I am grateful for that kind intervention, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I have been down all the official routes.

At the meeting, I soon discovered that it was impossible to get straight answers to my straightforward questions. Ruth Walker, for example, said that the problems of Owen’s care have been addressed by the introduction of the EWS—early warning signs—system. When my medical colleague pointed out to her that all the nursing notes were entered in the EWS format, she could not come up with an explanation. I was also astonished that Dr Shortland was unable to give a straight answer when asked about the arrangements for weekend medical cover. The board members were prepared to hide behind another independent report, but the report was incomplete, failing to comment on Owen’s continuing low grade fever, the rise in his white blood cells, the rise in his C-reactive protein count, the failure of an effective handover process between medical staff and why no doctor saw Owen during his two weekends in hospital.

I have always been a strong supporter of our national health service. I can be proud of representing Cynon Valley, a constituency that is both geographically and philosophically close to the community that bred Aneurin Bevan. It was the community that formed Bevans’ views on the need for an effective health service that is free at the point of need and where the quality of care is not influenced by one’s ability to pay.

Long before becoming a politician, I was on the Welsh Hospital Board from 1970 to 1974 with people such as Arianwen Bevan-Norris, who was Aneurin Bevan’s sister, and Archie Lush, his agent, and I know what they would be saying to me today: “Carry on. Keep on going.” They would not have accepted these kinds of answers. I was also the only Welsh member of the royal commission on the national health service, which met for three years from 1976 to 1979. We made many recommendations at the time, but they were unfortunately not acted upon. If they had been, I am sure that some of today’s problems would have been avoided.

The House will understand my sorrow at the loss of Owen. It is heartbreaking to find that the people whom we appoint to safeguard our services, and who benefit from a significant income and a highly respected position in our society, are unable to address the failings of their organisation, engaging instead in obfuscation and half-truths. The cover-up mentality has to stop. We all make mistakes, but we should be ready to admit them.

My case is not unusual. I have previously told the House of the thousands of letters I received from people from all over the country when I was producing a report for the Government on complaints in England. I knew that the NHS did not treat its complainants well, but I did not expect to be here still looking for answers nearly six years later. In the past, Mr Speaker has allowed me to read out letters that I have received, and more than 4,500 people have written to me about NHS complaints, 500 of which related to the University Hospital of Wales. I am sorry to say that two of my close friends have since died at the same hospital, and complaints have been made about their treatment as well.

In the introduction to the shocking report on Gosport War Memorial Hospital, which was published a few weeks ago, Bishop James Jones of Liverpool said that “what has to be recognised by those who head up our public institutions is how difficult it is for ordinary people to challenge the closing of ranks of those who hold power. It is a lonely place, seeking answers to questions that others wish you were not asking.” I will continue to ask those questions on behalf of my family and of the many others who are grieving and who have not had answers.

9.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): I begin by thanking the right hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) for securing this important debate. I know how incredibly personal this is for her. Her being able to stand in this Chamber...
to talk so movingly and so passionately about her late husband’s time in hospital, and her dedication to trying to bring about a service that is fit for everybody, is commendable.

Prior to being elected to this House, I had the great privilege of working in the hospice movement. One thing I take from that time is that, when a relative is as poorly as the right hon. Lady’s husband was, it is not just the patient who we need to think about. We need to think about family members, too, because it is an incredibly stressful time, and I am sorry to hear her account. I have read some of the reports of interviews she has given over the years since the death of her husband, and giving those interviews takes an enormous amount of inner courage. She certainly has my admiration.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss the important matter of NHS complaints in Wales, and I commend the right hon. Lady for her excellent work over the past few years, particularly her review of NHS complaints handling in England. The review was welcome, and many of its recommendations have been put into action in the NHS across England.

This has obviously been an interesting debate because of that aspect, and the right hon. Lady will know, as other hon. Members will know, that the national health service in Wales is, of course, primarily a devolved area and responsibility for it lies with the Welsh Government. Generally, this Government have responsibility only for the NHS in England. As I hope the House will appreciate, there is a limit to the extent to which I can comment on some of the issues under discussion today, but I will respond to as many points as possible. I am also more than happy to ensure that a transcript of this debate is sent to the responsible Minister in the Senedd in Cardiff.

Our national health service is hugely valued by people in Wales, as was clearly demonstrated over the weekend by the townspeople of Tredgar, who marched through the streets to commemorate its 70th anniversary. Millions of people in Wales and the rest of the UK access the NHS every day and receive the excellent service they deserve and to which they are entitled. We should recognise the unstinting efforts of all those working in all parts of the NHS across the UK who contribute to that service, but that should not prevent us from looking at ourselves critically when things go wrong and from putting those things right.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has put an awful amount of emphasis on improving standards. Of course staff across the NHS in Wales and the rest of the UK want to do their best, and I am the first to acknowledge that that is often in very stressful situations.

Frankly, patients and their loved ones can be nervous about complaining. Older people, in particular, often do not want, as they see it, to make a fuss. They can sometimes worry that, by complaining, their care may somehow be adversely affected, which is clearly not what the right hon. Lady, I or anyone else wants. By putting in place an open, transparent and confident complaints system, we can assure patients, young and old, that their complaints will be dealt with fairly and openly, and they need not fear raising them. Both patients and staff within the NHS need to be assured that they are being listened to and properly supported through the complaints process. We need an effective complaints system operating within a supportive organisational structure and led by strong, confident leadership at all levels— that is an important part of an effective complaints process. Only an organisation with an open culture that is willing to look seriously at itself can be trusted to investigate properly how it operates.

Complaints need to be handled promptly and in a timely manner, and, of course, responses should be accurate and should fully address the issues raised in complaints. An open culture with strong leadership can prevent a hospital or health board from responding defensively to a complaint, seeking to limit damage to its own reputation at the expense of patient care. Many people across the UK, including the right hon. Lady, complain not just to gain redress for themselves or a loved one, but to help to ensure that others are not faced with the same, often painful and traumatic issue in the future.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said yesterday, “one of the strengths of having a four-nation healthcare system is that we learn from each other and share good ideas while providing the service that is best tailored for people in their particular locality.”—[Official Report, 3 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 183.]

I completely agree with her and with that sentiment, and I think we can and should all learn from each other. I want the health services in Wales and in the rest of the UK to be known as learning organisations and to be known across the world for providing the best healthcare in the world. I believe that the extra funding that we have announced, which will come to the Welsh Government, too, over the next five years, will present us with an opportunity to improve the patient experience across the country.

In closing, I want to say to the right hon. Lady that I appreciate the time she has taken to bring this debate to the House. As I said, I will make sure that a transcript of this debate and the points and concerns she has raised is given to the Ministers in the Welsh Government. I pay tribute to her remarkable dedication to making sure that the service provided in hospitals in Wales and across the UK is second to none and that people can feel confident in the care that they receive.

Question put and agreed to.

9.22 pm

House adjourned.
Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

Road Investment Strategy

1. Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Which road schemes he plans to allocate funding to as part of the second Road Investment Strategy. [906262]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Department is considering evidence about the strategic road network gathered by Highways England and stakeholders over the past two years, alongside responses to the consultation that took place over the winter. The Department will be announcing the decisions about which new enhancements will be included in the second road investment strategy in 2019.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: I thank my hon. Friend. On the A417 missing link scheme Swindon to Gloucester, can he confirm that it is the Government’s intention that a preferred route will be announced in the first quarter of next year, followed by the development consent order process, with an intention to commence in the early 2020s to build this much-needed road where there has been a fatality recently?

Jesse Norman: This road is both dangerous and highly congested. Highways England has been carrying out a consultation on improving the missing link near the Air Balloon pub, as my hon. Friend will know, and I have recently met him and colleagues. Once the responses have been analysed there will be further consultation ahead of the preferred route announcement. We certainly hope there will be a PRA early in 2019.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): I am sure the Minister is aware that road links between Sheffield and Manchester are as bad as between any two major cities in Europe, and I invite him to join me to demonstrate that fact, as one of his predecessors did. Will he confirm that even if construction work will not start in the next funding period, at least design work will start on the promised scheme to link the two cities together?

Jesse Norman: I can make no such confirmation; the hon. Gentleman knows the structure of RIS2, and we will make the announcement in 2019, but I will be delighted to have further conversations with him about the scheme in question.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I listened very carefully to what the Minister said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown). The A417 missing link road scheme is important to all Members of Parliament for, and the county of, Gloucestershire, so I welcome what the Minister said and urge him to follow through on his commitments to my hon. Friend, and remind him that we will all be watching and waiting to make sure he follows through on the commitments he has made at the Dispatch Box.

Jesse Norman: I am always grateful for reminders of the importance of parliamentary accountability, and I take that cue. My right hon. Friend will recall that this is not an inexpensive scheme. We are hoping to bring it to birth, and have given it a very strong commitment and continue to do so, and we are looking for a PRA early in 2019, as I have said.

Conor McGinn (St Helens North) (Lab): Haydock island in my constituency is where junction 23 of the M6 meets the East Lancs road and very busy local roads. The system has been reconfigured but still is not working, and my constituents, residents and local businesses are suffering. Will the Minister meet me and local representatives to ensure we can improve it by including it in the next scheme in 2019?

Jesse Norman: If that scheme has been placed into the RIS2 consultation it will presently be a matter for consultation with officials. I am happy to have a meeting with the hon. Gentleman, but not in any sense that puts the formal process of consultation and deliberation at risk.

Transport Infrastructure

2. Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): What steps he is taking to invest in transport infrastructure. [906263]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): The Government are investing record sums to deliver the transport infrastructure that Britain needs. The Department for Transport’s annual capital spending will more than double over this decade, from £8 billion in 2009-10 to £17 billion in 2019-20. This money will deliver our ambitious five-year investment plan for the rail and strategic road networks, take forward delivery of High Speed 2, and help improve air quality.

Dr Whitford: First, I am going to use my position to wish all staff in the NHS a very happy 70th birthday.

The Secretary of State makes the classic mistake of thinking infrastructure is just steel and concrete, but the airspace routes above the UK were designed in the ’60s and simply cannot cope with the 2.3 million planes that use them every year. The NATS air traffic centre at Prestwick has invested in the technology to allow more...
direct planning and shorter routes and to save fuel and reduce noise. When will the Government actually reform the airspace?

Chris Grayling: I echo the hon. Lady’s comments about the NHS. I am looking forward this afternoon to travelling out with my local ambulance service to see the work of NHS staff, which, as she rightly says, is first rate.

As you will be aware, Mr Speaker, we have already launched the process of airspace reform in this country. We are currently depending on technology that is decades old; it is not now fit for purpose and we need to move to a world that is controlled by state-of-the-art digital technology. That will create the capacity we need, and a rolling programme is planned for the coming years of modernisation of our airspace across the UK.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): A second entrance at Putney station would not only ease congestion, but would finally give connectivity with East Putney tube station. This project is supported financially by Wandsworth Council. Can the Secretary of State, following our recent meeting, look carefully at what support his Department can give this scheme so it can finally get go-ahead?

Chris Grayling: I regard that scheme as a quick win that could make a real difference to passengers. I have asked my officials to consider it carefully, and I will carry on talking about it with my right hon. Friend. I am sympathetic towards the potential benefits of creating a better interchange between the underground and the mainline railway in her constituency.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): The Transport Secretary mentioned technology. Since the Government have devolved funding for speed cameras to local police forces, cameras have been switched off due to policing cuts. Will the Government reconsider that? There have been some severe accidents on the A449 Stafford Road in my constituency, including a fatality, and we need new speed cameras on that route.

Chris Grayling: I will absolutely take a look at that issue. We try to devolve responsibility for such things, but I will look carefully at that. We should always be mindful of stretches of road where there have been fatalities.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the Secretary of State for his interest in the Shipley eastern bypass and for coming to visit my constituency to see the route at first hand. Will he update me, the House and my constituents on the progress being made towards finally introducing a bypass?

Chris Grayling: My officials are currently considering what it would take to move the project forwards, and I have had discussions with the combined authority. The potential route sits alongside a growth area in West Yorkshire, so I am personally taking an interest in the scheme, which is now subject to careful assessment.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): In recent weeks we have seen endless delays, cancellations across the north and a report from the Select Committee on Transport that confirmed a bias against northern regions in rail investment decisions, and we now hear reports that the trans-Pennine electrification will be scrapped altogether. Will the Secretary of State now respond properly to the One North campaign and commit to giving Transport for the North the full powers and funding it needs to deliver the necessary changes?

Chris Grayling: I am afraid that this is a total misnomer. First, the part of the country that will receive the highest Government spending per head on transport over the next five years is the north-west. Spending is higher per head of population across the north than it is in the south. Secondly, as I have already announced, we will start the £3 billion trans-Pennine upgrade next spring, which will substantially rebuild the railway line between Manchester, Leeds and York and deliver much better services to passengers. It is long overdue.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Network Rail plays a key role in delivering rail infrastructure investment projects both north and south of the border. Given that many of the Secretary of State’s colleagues think that Network Rail is too big, that he often gives it a kicking himself and that the Scottish Government have responsibility for the strategic delivery of rail north of the border, will he at least take steps to devolve Network Rail fully to the Scottish Government?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman keeps arguing for that, but it was not recommended by the commission that examined what powers the Scottish Government should have. My advice to the Scottish Government is to try to use the powers they have well rather than ask for more.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I urge my right hon. Friend to look favourably upon applications for investment in smaller schemes on de-trunked roads, such as the A350 and the C13 in my constituency. They are vital arteries for growing the economy in Dorset and, indeed, the wider south-west.

Chris Grayling: De-trunked roads are an important priority for me. We are shaping our plans to introduce the major road network and to start making funds available for things such as bypasses on roads that were de-trunked 20 or 30 years ago and where there is a pressing need for improvement.

Heathrow Expansion: Landing Charges

3. Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential effect of increased landing charges at Heathrow Airport on the financial viability of the proposed expansion of that airport.[906264]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I have been absolutely clear that expansion will be privately financed, and the Government have taken independent expert advice which demonstrated that expansion is capable of being financed without Government support. I have been clear that airport charges must be controlled, which is why I set out in 2016 that expansion should be delivered with airport charges remaining as
close as possible to current levels. It is the Civil Aviation Authority’s job to enforce that, and I am certain that it will do so.

**Ruth Cadbury:** The Airports Commission has indicated that landing charges would have to rise by around 70% per passenger, and British Airways has warned that any such increase would make many routes from Heathrow no longer commercially viable. Would that not have significant consequences for regional connections and/or increase ticket prices for passengers?

**Chris Grayling:** We have of course been working to ensure that the cost of the original scheme was brought down in order to avoid a 70% rise in landing charges, but I have been clear that the requirement to set aside around 15% of slots for regional connections is non-negotiable and fixed. It will not be possible to change those slots to long-haul destinations because they are an essential part of the reform.

**Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): When will the flightpaths be published?

**Chris Grayling:** I expect that we will complete plans for airspace modernisation over the coming months. There will be a rolling programme in the early 2020s, and I expect details of that plan to be made clear, probably in 2019.

### M65 Extension

4. **Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the potential merits of extending the M65 from Colne to Keighley.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman):** Highways England has gathered evidence about the performance of the strategic road network, and future pressures on it, to inform the decisions we have taken as part of the second road investment strategy. This process of evidence gathering and public consultation has taken into consideration the idea of extending the M65.

**Graham P. Jones:** The Secretary of State has invested in the idea of a rail link between Liverpool and Hull, connecting the east and west through the central low Pennines. Do the Government accept that a road link would be complementary? It would go through deprived communities and provide a huge economic uplift. Do the Government recognise that this is the great northern powerhouse project?

**Jesse Norman:** As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, we are already investing £1.5 billion in road systems in the north-west. Of course the M65 is, in a way, a legendary road because it ends in a carpark, and no one thinks that is a satisfactory arrangement. I would welcome a further conversation with him about this, but the situation is far from straightforward.

**John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): Will Ministers also look favourably on restoring a rail link between Keighley and Colne by restoring the Skipton to Colne rail link, starting in the Government Chief Whip’s constituency? Will they look carefully at the feasibility study that is under way?

**Jesse Norman:** That is something we will certainly be looking at carefully.

### Leaving the EU: Ports

5. **Steve Double** (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): What assessment he has made of the potential effect on the level of transport-related activity at ports of the UK leaving the EU.

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):** UK ports are adaptive and market-oriented. They are ready to facilitate growth in trade when we leave the EU. Over the medium and longer-term, patterns of maritime and inland traffic may be affected by the trade agreements we reach with the EU and with countries elsewhere. It is too early to predict in detail what those patterns will be, but ports nationwide are prepared for all likely eventualities.

**Steve Double:** The stunningly picturesque river port of Fowey is a magnet for visitors by both land and sea, but it is also a busy commercial port that ships the world’s finest china clay around the world. How will the Department’s recently published port connectivity study assist small river ports like Fowey?

**Chris Grayling:** As we plan infrastructure improvements over the coming years, I want us to look at how we best connect, in the most effective way possible, the ports upon which our country depends, both large and small. Of course, my hon. Friend will be aware that we are already demonstrating our commitment to improving the road network in his area, with the planned completion of the new link road up to the A30.

**Fiona Onasanya** (Peterborough) (Lab): The Government have moved from saying they want trade with the EU post Brexit to be tariff-free to saying that they want it to be as tariff-free as possible. In which sectors of the economy and industry does the Secretary of State think it will be acceptable for there to be tariffs?

**Mr Speaker:** In relation to ports.

**Chris Grayling:** As the hon. Lady will be aware, this is not really a transport matter. Our ports will be ready, and our plans for how we manage our borders will be ready for all eventualities, but I want, I believe and I expect that we will have a sensible agreement with the European Union that avoids the charging of tariffs. That is certainly what the EU wants, and it is what we want.

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): My Inverclyde constituency has a thriving port at Greenock, with cruise ships and container ships docking on a daily basis. Can the Secretary of State assure me that the systems, including IT systems, that will be required post-Brexit are well on their way to completion so that ports such as Greenock will not be adversely affected by the UK leaving the European Union?
Chris Grayling: The answer is yes but, of course, most of our ports are well used to dealing with traffic from both inside and outside the European Union. Those handling freight move it through extremely quickly and effectively, and they have great expertise in doing so. I am very optimistic that our ports will do a great job in the post-Brexit world.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): In his opening remarks the Secretary of State said it is too early to predict the effects on transport at ports. That is ridiculous, considering that we will leave the EU in March 2019. Half of his Cabinet is arguing for a no-deal Brexit, so it is coming at us really fast. We already know it is predicted that an extra two minutes of checks at Dover would result in 30-mile tailbacks, so what is he doing to put in place IT systems and border infrastructure systems that allow joined-up, continued free movement?

Chris Grayling: The Government and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs are doing extensive work for all eventualities. As I have previously said in the House, we do not intend to impose any form of hard border in Dover. It would be logistically impossible to do so, and therefore any flow of customs through Dover in the post-Brexit world will have to be managed in an online, electronic way. It is not possible to create fixed systems at Dover.

Transport Infrastructure

6. Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect of operationally efficient transport infrastructure on levels of productivity.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): Transport infrastructure has an important role to play in helping to increase our productivity. That is why we have set out to more than double our capital investment in transport over the decade to 2020, and why it is a central part of our industrial strategy.

Gillian Keegan: Many of my constituents in Chichester and the surrounding area lose hours and hours each week sitting in traffic on the A27. That has a knock-on negative impact on productivity, the local economy and the environment. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that road investment decisions for areas such as Chichester, which are already over capacity, are prioritised in the road infrastructure investments for 2020 to 2025?

Chris Grayling: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, who has been doing a fantastic job of trying to get the A27 project back on track. I am absolutely aware of its importance to her constituency and to the south coast. It is important that the community in Chichester reaches a consensus about the right option, and of course I then want to see the project go ahead.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows the effect on productivity in places such as Yorkshire and my constituency. On the 70th anniversary of the NHS, when we wish all those workers a very good day, is it not a fact that many of them are struggling to get to work because of his policies and his lack of sense of direction on transport infrastructure?

Chris Grayling: Actually it is this Government who are investing in rail and are providing new trains right across the north; who have just opened the last stretch of motorway-grade road between London and Newcastle; who are investing money in smart motorways; and who are putting money into Leeds, to ensure better connectivity there, and into towns and cities around the north. I wish Opposition Members would start to talk up the north and the improvements that are happening, rather than talking it down and pretending nothing is happening.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I have a wonderful piece of transport infrastructure in my constituency called Blackpool airport. Will the Secretary of State tell me what steps will be taken to ensure that with a third runway at Heathrow, we will see improved connectivity to my part of the north-west?

Chris Grayling: This is why I am committed to saying that the 15% of slots set aside for regional connections are set in stone. We are not going to see those suddenly disappear from 15% to 10% to 5%, with routes diverted elsewhere. The expansion of Heathrow is a really important part of delivering improvements right around the United Kingdom, and I am committed to making sure that happens.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): This summer, my constituents who commute by rail had had to put with up with delays, cancellations and ineffective bus services as a result of work on the great western main line, and we now learn that equipment is rusting in the Severn tunnel. Although the infrastructure investment is welcome, will the Minister ensure that this is not an excuse for train operating companies to provide a reduced quality service? Will he also ensure that there is no more disruption than there needs to be?

Chris Grayling: This is one of the great conundrums. We are spending money around the country and it is impossible to deliver investment without some disruption. I absolutely would not accept a train company using that as an opportunity to do things that are not right for passengers, but we have to accept that if we are going to modernise different parts of our road and rail infrastructure, some disruptive consequences are inevitable, however much we might wish that was not the case.

E10 Fuel

8. Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): What representations he has received on the introduction of provisions relating to E10 fuel since the consultation on the alternative fuels infrastructure directive.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Department absolutely recognises, as the Government do, the importance of clean air, and established a working group with the fuel industry and others in November 2017 to look at issues relating to the potential introduction of E10 fuel. This group has also considered the new fuel labelling requirements introduced by the alternative fuels infrastructure directive. We intend to consult on proposals later this year and, in some cases, potentially very soon.

1.[Official Report, 12 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 8MC.]
Nic Dakin: The forthcoming mandatory changes to pump labelling are the perfect opportunity to consider introducing E10. Will the Minister confirm that there will be a question in that consultation that allows people to respond on introducing E10 in the future?

Jesse Norman: I can certainly confirm that we will be consulting shortly on E10 and that we are looking closely at the issue of fuel labelling, which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, has to be addressed relatively quickly.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Does the Minister accept that what is really needed is an overall, measured, strategic approach to the propulsion mix for vehicles? That will rightly include E10, but it will also include diesel. What has been so damaging to that industry has been the Government’s war on diesel, which has been hugely damaging to our automotive sector, as well as our engine manufacturing.

Jesse Norman: I can only salute the right hon. Gentleman’s expertise in crowbarring a question about diesel into exchanges about E10. We are taking a strategic approach. We introduced changes to the renewable transport fuel obligation earlier this year. We have changed the status of the crop cap. We are pushing for the increased use of waste-based biofuels, and we are supporting the introduction of higher-performance fuels in other sectors of the transport world.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) did mention diesel, which is a fuel, so I am not sure that a crowbar was altogether required. It is a matter of terminological preference, I think.

A12: Gallows Corner Roundabout

9. Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): If he will take steps to ensure the improvement of safety at the Gallows Corner roundabout on the A12.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): As my hon. Friend will know, the A12 in London is managed by Transport for London as part of its route network. The Department for Transport consultation on proposals for the creation of a major road network was launched in December and included an indicative network of the expected future major roads. That included the A12 and A127 at Gallows Corner. We aim to publish a consultation response this summer. The roads forming the final major roads network will be confirmed by the end of 2018.

Andrew Rosindell: The Minister will be aware that the Gallows Corner flyover at the A127-A12 junction is a very congested accident hotspot. The hopelessly inadequate response from TfL and the Mayor of London should be dealt with by the national Government. Will money from the national highways budget be used so that the Government can step in to help us to resolve this ongoing problem?

Jesse Norman: My hon. Friend has regularly and properly raised this issue. It is a matter for TfL, but I am happy to have a further conversation with him about how we can look into it.
Mr Speaker: One thing is clear to me: if the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) encounters road congestion, his antidote to it is to pursue what might be called an indirect route.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): One thing that would reduce road congestion is, of course, getting people out of their cars and on to their bikes. We very much welcome the upgrade of the A358 in Taunton, but does the Secretary of State agree that whatever route is chosen by Highways England, the provision of adequate cycling infrastructure should very much be part of upgrades?

Chris Grayling: I always hope that when a new road is put in place, provision will be made for other users—cyclists and pedestrians—alongside that road, particularly in respect of a major road like the A358. That new road will of course mean that there is substantial additional capacity on the old road, which will become much less congested, but I am sure that Highways England will be looking carefully into how it can make provision for all road users.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The A38 from Exeter to Plymouth closes too often owing to accidents and congestion. Will the Secretary of State look favourably on funding bids from Plymouth City Council and Tory-run Devon County Council to upgrade this road, address accident blackspots and start the much needed process of extending the M5 from Exeter to Plymouth?

Chris Grayling: I am obviously aware of the pressures on the A38 and, indeed, of the pressures on roads north and west from Plymouth. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South East Cornwall (Mrs Murray) who, last week, made a very strong argument to me when I visited Cornwall for improvements to the west of Plymouth. That is something that we are looking at very carefully.

Rail Disruption: Passenger Compensation

11. Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure the provision of compensation to passengers affected by recent rail disruption. [906273]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): Recent disruption on the rail service has been unacceptable and the Government have been clear that passengers will be appropriately compensated. Transport for the North has agreed that the special compensation should cover weekly, monthly and annual season ticket holders on the worst affected northern routes who experienced severe disruption before and after the May timetable change.

Paula Sherriff: Well, that all sounds very good in principle, but owing to weeks of chaos, cancellations and delays, my constituent, Alex Hodgson, has had to use a significant proportion of his annual leave. He is still being passed between departments at TransPennine Express and has now been offered the equivalent of £1 a day compensation. Despite assurances from the Secretary of State, he and other constituents feel let down and ignored. What will the Minister do about it?

Joseph Johnson: Transport for the North has set out high-level details of the scheme, which will enable passengers who have season tickets to be compensated for up to one month's cash compensation where they have suffered severe disruption. That is in addition to the normal compensation schemes available to passengers through the delay repay mechanism.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Passengers are experiencing significant delays travelling from west to east on TransPennine Express services, owing to cancellations and other delays. Will the Minister do everything that he can to persuade TransPennine Express to improve these services and to offer proper compensation? Season ticket holders in Yorkshire are getting one week's compensation, whereas those in the north-west are getting one month's compensation. That does not seem fair.

Joseph Johnson: Transport for the North has determined that passengers on the most severely affected routes, principally on Northern services, will get four weeks' cash compensation, as my hon. Friend rightly said, and those on the less severely affected routes, which happen to be in Yorkshire, will receive one week's cash compensation. That is a matter for Transport for the North.

Lilian Greenwood (Nottingham South) (Lab): The National Audit Office revealed that the Minister's Department has allowed Govia Thameslink Railway to buy out its liabilities for poor performance through to September 2018. The Public Accounts Committee has concluded that the threat to strip GTR of its franchise is not a credible one. What can he do to protect passengers from a continuation of the current appalling performance if the 15 July interim timetable fails to bring stability?

Joseph Johnson: Rail operating companies will be held responsible for that portion of performance for which they are responsible and accountable, and that is now under way. The Secretary of State has set in train a hard review of GTR, and at the end of that hard review, all appropriate options will be on the table and available to the Secretary of State and to the whole Government.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It was a Labour Government who established the NHS, and today we thank all who have served in it since.

Following the Secretary of State's statement on the timetable chaos to the House on 4 June, he said in his response to the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) that, with regard to compensation, the train operating companies "will have to meet the cost of that."—[Official Report, 4 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 59.]

That is so untrue. It is Network Rail that will be funding the compensation. Last year alone, it paid out £482 million through schedules 4 and 8. Does the Minister agree that, while the operating companies write the cheques, it is the state that pays?

Joseph Johnson: The Secretary of State has always been clear that we will review where responsibility lies, and the rail industry will be responsible for undertaking that appropriate compensation to make sure that passengers have the right redress. As Members will be aware, the
rail industry is partly in public control through Network Rail and partly run by private operators. Each will pay its fair share.

Rachael Maskell: Astonishing. Network Rail paying compensation means that this is coming from the public, so, in effect, passengers will be funding their own compensation for delayed and cancelled trains, for missing exams, for being sacked from their jobs or for lost business revenue—passengers paying their own compensation. How much has the Minister budgeted for to pay compensation for the Secretary of State’s decision to press ahead with this rail timetable chaos, or will he instead cut more Network Rail projects to pay for it?

Joseph Johnson: As I have already said, the compensation involves four weeks’ cash compensation for passengers on the most severely disrupted routes on Northern services and one week’s compensation further afield in Yorkshire. Similarly, GTR announced yesterday a comparable package of special compensation for passengers on the most affected Thameslink and Great Northern routes.

Rail Services: Congleton

12. Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): What progress has been made on improving rail services in Congleton constituency.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): As part of the improvements to Northern Rail services, there are more frequent, hourly Sunday stopping services from Stoke to Manchester via Macclesfield. Congleton station will benefit from full waiting room refurbishment, new seating, customer information systems, new and improved signage and new ticket vending machines.

Fiona Bruce: I thank the Secretary of State for that reply—and all that in the north. It is encouraging that, after years of local campaigning by my constituents, a strategic outline business case has been developed for enhancing the mid-Cheshire rail line, including reopening Middlewich railway station in that growing town. What assurance can the Secretary of State give me that funding is available for this vital development work?

Chris Grayling: There are two routes in the north that I feel particularly keen to look at seriously reopening. One is the line from Skipton to Colne. The other is the line that passes through Middlewich in my hon. Friend’s constituency that, in my view, should be a commuter railway into Manchester. Transport for the North has been working on the options, and I am committed to ensuring that we take that work forward.

Passenger Rail Usage


The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): With two decades of almost unbroken growth, we have seen rail passenger journeys more than double since the mid-1990s. For the first time since 2009-10, statistics from the Office of Rail and Road show a small decline in rail journeys over the past year, although passenger kilometres have continued to increase.

Jo Stevens: Rail passenger usage is falling. Is it any wonder that my constituents in Cardiff Central are giving up on using the trains, when a standard return rail ticket to London for a morning meeting costs £235? With that money, they could fly from our Welsh Labour Government-owned Cardiff airport to Barcelona and back three times and still have change for a taxi home.

Joseph Johnson: The Government are conscious of the cost of fares to the travelling public. For that reason, we have ensured that fares have risen at a lower rate than they did under the last Labour Government. The causes of the decline in season ticket numbers are complex. Although the statistics show a fall in journeys made using season tickets, there has been an increase in journeys made using other ticket types over the past year. Factors such as strikes, station closures and weather have had an impact on season ticket use.

Justin Madders: After years of campaigning, my constituents in Neston were delighted when they heard that the new Borderlands franchise would include a half-hourly service on the Wrexham to Bidston line. However, that joy was tempered somewhat with the news that the new service might not stop at every station. Given that a frequent and reliable service is vital for the residents of Neston, will the Minister join me in writing to his Welsh counterpart to impress on him the need for this service to stop at every station?

Joseph Johnson: I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he engage the Welsh Government in Wales, who have primary responsibility for specifications to that service.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given growing demand for rail travel from Kettering, will the Rail Minister ensure that there is more capacity on local train services under the new midland main line franchise?

Joseph Johnson: I would be delighted to engage with my hon. Friend on that question. We are investing substantially in midlands services and ensuring that new trains provide extra capacity and reduced journey times.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The most recent assessment must be that passenger rail usage is down, because people cannot get into London today. Can the Minister tell us why that is?

Joseph Johnson: Yes, I can tell my right hon. Friend why that is. There has been a major signalling outage on the Brighton main line service, which has affected services throughout the network. Although this is the responsibility of Network Rail, the situation has affected services substantially on the Brighton main line. That is why we are investing £300 million in this route, with work starting in the coming months.
Mr Speaker: The concept of a signalling outage was previously unknown to me, but I suppose that it merely reinforces one in the knowledge that one learns something new every day.

Sir Desmond Swayne: What will they think of next?

Mr Speaker: One wonders.

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to convey my very best wishes to the NHS—the greatest social achievement in British history—and also to convey my best wishes and a happy birthday to my hon. Friend the Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell)?

Quite clearly from yesterday’s PMQs, the Prime Minister is clueless about the sharp decline in bus ridership that her Government have presided over. I hope that the Secretary of State has a better analysis of the collapse in rail passenger usage—although I am not holding my breath. Can he explain last month’s figures from the Office of Rail and Road that show the biggest fall in passenger journeys since privatisation? Is he not alarmed that there were 2 million fewer journeys on GTR year on year and millions fewer journeys on South Western Railway?

Joseph Johnson: As I said, the decline in passenger journeys is a relatively recent phenomenon. Passenger kilometres continue to grow. It is difficult to determine exactly why we have this decline in season tickets, but we believe that it is due to factors such as strikes and recent station closures. In areas outside of London where there have not been those factors, we have not seen similar declines in passenger journeys.

Andy McDonald: Poor, very poor. The fact that the Minister is not more alarmed by this sorry state of affairs will be of great concern to millions of long-suffering passengers. It has never been clearer that there is something very seriously wrong with the railways on his watch, with franchising failure, timetabling chaos, broken promises on investment and people shifting from rail to road. He says that he does not run the trains—which is self-evident, by the way—but, for goodness’ sake, does he not realise that he has to step in and get a grip before our great railway hits the buffers?

Joseph Johnson: Labour’s policies of nationalisation would be no panacea for the challenges we face. Indeed, those challenges spring to a very large extent from the publicly owned parts of the rail industry—namely, Network Rail, the part that is due to state control. We see passenger interests as best served by bringing together in partnership the very best of the public and private sectors, as the Secretary of State set out in his strategic vision for rail last November.

Mr Speaker: A sentence perhaps—Mr Dan Carden.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Northern powerhouse rail would transform rail journeys for passengers in Liverpool, with journey times to Manchester cut to 20 minutes, but it simply cannot happen without the electrification of the trans-Pennine line. So instead of playing party politics with the numbers, does the Minister not realise that his Government will be judged on the major infrastructure projects that they complete?

Joseph Johnson: We are just completing the £1 billion investment in the great north rail project, which included significant electrification of the Liverpool to Manchester route. We are now about to embark on the next control period for rail, in which we will spend £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine route upgrade. This is the single largest enhancement programme across the entire country, representing a third of all such spending.

Rail Network: Devon and Cornwall

14. Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): If he will make an assessment of the role of the rail network in Devon and Cornwall in supporting the economy of the south-west.

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The rail network plays a vital part in supporting our economy across the country, including in Devon and Cornwall. That is why we are investing more than £400 million in the rail network in the south-west. This includes a fleet of brand-new trains for services to Devon and Cornwall.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware from our recent discussions that there is real disquiet in Devon and Cornwall about the references to it in recent consultation about the future of the CrossCountry franchise. Can he reassure me that there is no intention of ending vital direct services from key locations such as Manchester, Birmingham and Bristol to the heart of south Devon’s English riviera?

Joseph Johnson: As I said to my hon. Friend when we discussed this issue a few days ago, the south-west is a vital part of our rail network. I am looking forward to discussing these issues with him further, as well as with the Peninsula Rail Task Force, which I hope to meet next week when I am in Cornwall discussing rail issues. The CrossCountry franchise offers passengers the ability to travel to Birmingham and on to the north-east and Scotland, or they can change at stations en route to connect on to trains that take them to other parts of the country.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): The Minister just mentioned the Peninsula Rail Task Force. In the Government’s response to the recommendations in February, they said: “we will look at improving connectivity between the Peninsula, Bristol and beyond”.

However, as we have just heard, that does not sound like it is happening, particularly with the CrossCountry franchise. Can the Minister explain what is meant by “improving connectivity”?

Joseph Johnson: No decisions have been taken on any options for the next franchise. This consultation is a way for us to gather the views of the travelling public and of Members of the House, so that we have the best-informed choice of possible options when we take those decisions.
A19: Collisions

15. Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of collisions on the A19 in the North East. [906279]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): On a point of information, the NHS was brought into policy by William Beveridge, a Liberal, and it was framed in law in a White Paper by Sir Henry Willink, a Conservative. It is therefore—[Interruption.] It ill becomes the Labour party on the 70th birthday to make a party political issue of the national health service.

Mr Speaker: Order. I indulged the Minister, who is an historian and a philosopher, and these are matters of argument. If I may say so, Mr McDonald, you are almost unfailingly a good-natured person. You are, in addition, one of the most excitable denizens of the House. I do not know whether you rejoice in that status or regard it as an accolade, but there it is.

Jesse Norman: I am grateful, Mr Speaker. I think I can calm the hon. Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) by giving my answer to the question asked.

Highways England’s 2017 regional safety report assessed the safety performance of all the routes in the Yorkshire and north-east region, including the A19. The A19 is performing well compared with other routes of its type, but Highways England is not complacent, and a number of further studies and safety improvement schemes are planned.

Mr Hepburn: Happy 70th anniversary to the NHS—an institution that was opposed every step of the way by the Tories when the Labour party brought it in. Can I bring the Minister’s attention to the “Safe A19” campaign run by my local newspapers, the Shields Gazette and the Sunderland Echo, and supported by myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Grahame Morris)? It is of no surprise to anybody that the number of incidents and accidents on that road is linked to the fact that roads in the north get half the amount of investment as roads in the south-east. What is the Minister doing to protect the people of the north?

Jesse Norman: As the hon. Gentleman will know, we take all issues of safety very seriously, and the same is true in the case of the A19. I have visited the A19 and seen schemes at work. We have further work planned on it, always with safety in mind.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Transport Select Committee—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should ask his Question 17. [Interruption.] I could have linked it, I suppose, but I did not.

Transport Expenditure: London and the North-east

17. Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): If he will take steps to close the gap in transport expenditure per capita between London and the north-east. [906281]

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): The Government are committed to investing in infrastructure to support regional growth, and that is why we are addressing under-investment in the north with the biggest investment programme for a generation.

Grahame Morris: The Transport Select Committee has found that a disproportionate amount of transport funding is being spent in the capital, at the expense of the regions. What steps will the Minister take to close the gap and to specifically address issues highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn), including the “Safe A19” campaign, the Seaton Lane A19 junction improvement and ensuring that east Durham gets a rail halt at Horden?

Joseph Johnson: The Government are investing substantial sums in the north—£13 billion in the five years to 2020—and in the next control period for rail, we will invest £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine upgrade alone. The hon. Gentleman, I am afraid, is factually wrong to say that Government investment per head in London and the south exceeds that of similar investment in the north. IPA analysis shows that for the three years to 2021, the north will receive £1.039 per head, which is £10 more than similar figures for the south of England.¹

Oxford to Cambridge Expressway

18. Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): When he plans to make a decision on the preferred route for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway. [906282]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): We expect to make a decision on the preferred corridor for the Oxford to Cambridge expressway this summer. There then has to be further work on the detailed route within that corridor.

Layla Moran: I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. Given that any of these routes will have an enormous impact on both communities and the environment, does he not share my concern that the public have not been consulted at all?

Chris Grayling: No roads can be built without public consultation. We are working out in broad measure which route a corridor might follow, so that we can then do detailed consultation with the public.

Bus Routes: England and Wales

19. Rosie Duffield (Canterbury) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of trends in the number of bus routes in England and Wales. [906283]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Whether for commuting to work or seeing friends and family, buses play an important role in keeping communities connected, with 4.4 billion passenger journeys a year. Between 2015 and 2017, the number of live local bus services registered increased by 14% in England and by 6% in Wales.

Rosie Duffield: My constituents have had to face a 480% rise in the cost of their children’s bus passes in the past five years. The No. 14 bus connecting Canterbury to rural east Kent villages was cut in September, and replaced by only a twice-daily bus service. This is just one of the cuts proposed by Kent County Council. What steps is the Minister taking to protect much needed rural bus routes from being cut by cash-strapped local authorities?

Ms Ghanji: Local authorities receive a substantial amount of money from central Government to support bus services. The Government paid out some £250 million last year to support bus services in England. Kent County Council receives over £1 million per year, and Canterbury City Council receives over £83,000 per year. The hon. Lady mentioned bus fares. They rose almost three times faster every year under Labour than under the Conservatives, with local bus fares across Great Britain rising by an average of 1.9% each year in real terms. Bus fares go up under Labour.

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman from the Opposition Front Bench needs to be very brief, because time is against us, but we are happy to hear from the fella.

Matt Rodda: May I, too, wish the NHS a very happy birthday?

Nearly 500 bus routes have been cut every year under this Government, snatching away a lifeline from elderly, disabled and young people, as well as from rural communities, yet the Government seem unaware of the impact of these cuts. I have to say that the Prime Minster floundered yesterday, and sought to blame local authorities. Does the Minister share that view, or does she accept the undeniable truth that her Government have totally mismanaged bus provision in this country?

Ms Ghanji: Bus service provision is the responsibility of local authorities. About £800 million of funding is made available for concessionary bus fares, and £40 million is given directly to local authorities to support journeys that might not otherwise be profitable. As I mentioned earlier, there are local authorities working hand in hand with bus companies to make sure services are viable and attractive. May I just mention one? In Brighton and Hove, bus patronage has gone up by 22% since 2009-10.

Mr Speaker: The Minister is a treasure trove of previously unearthed information, for which we are extremely grateful.

Topical Questions

T1. [906287] Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): May I take this opportunity to thank Members on both sides of the House for the support they gave last week to the vote on the expansion of Heathrow airport? I think that sent a powerful message about the future of our country. The support came from the Government side of the House, the Opposition, the parties in Northern Ireland and Scottish Conservatives, and it was a resounding vote for the country’s future.

Sandy Martin: Although Greater Anglia and the Government both say that they want 15 minutes to be the trigger period for passenger compensation, travellers from Ipswich are still unable to claim any compensation until their trains are more than 30 minutes late. Given the number of failed trains, failing overhead wires, failing rails, failing points and failing signals, when will the Secretary of State rectify this anomaly and ensure that my constituents can claim the compensation that is readily available to passengers in the rest of the country?

Chris Grayling: The move across the country to repayment after a 15-minute delay is being phased in with new franchises that will start over the coming years. I say to passengers in East Anglia that every single train there is being replaced with a brand new one. That will improve performance, stop the blight of broken down old trains, and mean a much better travelling experience.

T4. [906291] Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): As I have said to Ministers previously, urgent repair works are required on the North bridge at Oundle to avoid a weight limit being introduced that would badly affect those who use the bus services, businesses, and the community more generally. What Government support is available to get such work done urgently, particularly in exceptional financial circumstances such as those currently faced by Northamptonshire?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): My hon. Friend has been a tireless campaigner on this issue, and I absolutely recognise his point. This is, in law, a matter for local government. We have provided them with some funding, and I would be delighted to have a further conversation with my hon. Friend about other ways in which we could consider the situation.
T3. [906289] **Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): In a deregulated bus system, local authorities have no control over routes and fares, and the amount of money for tendered services is being cut by 45%. How can the Prime Minister justify her statement that local authorities should be improving bus services? Will the Secretary of State give the Prime Minister a lesson in how the bus service system works?

**Chris Grayling:** What I will do is give a lesson to Labour Mayors about the reforms that we put in place in the last Parliament, which gave them franchising powers. The hon. Gentleman might like to ask the Mayor of Greater Manchester why his promise on bus franchising is years away from happening—the last estimate I heard was that it might just about be completed by 2023, which is way after his first term of office, and way after he made that commitment.

**T9. [906296] Theresa Villiers** (Chipping Barnet) (Con): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Government have no intention of allowing direct flights between the United Kingdom and the northern part of Cyprus?

**Chris Grayling:** Let me be clear: all Members of the House would like to see a long-term solution to the issues on the island of Cyprus. This country will continue to work with our friends in Cyprus to try to achieve that goal, but our policies on flights have not changed.

**T5. [906292] Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The east coast franchise is now run with the part publicly-owned London North Eastern Railway, and it is a major transport operation in Scotland. Despite that, the UK Government have not allowed any Scottish Government representation on the board. Will the Secretary of State re think that, and commit to ensuring that the Scottish Government are represented on that vital piece of infrastructure?

**The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson):** The London North Eastern Railway started operations on 24 June. We are in the process of establishing the east coast partnership board, and we will ensure independent representation on that board. We are in consultation with stakeholders across the length and breadth of the line to ensure that their views are taken into account in the management of that new operation.

**Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): In Redditch there are only two electric vehicle charging points, but nearby Coventry has 25. Redditchians are just as keen as Coventrians to take advantage of electric cars. What are the Government doing to help them?

**Jesse Norman:** My hon. Friend is right to focus on charging points. We have a large charging point network, and we are rapidly expanding it. As she knows, we have just announced a local charging infrastructure fund of £400 million. A lot of work is being done with local authorities, and I encourage her to work with us to develop further charging points in her area.

**T6. [906293] David Linden** (Glasgow East) (SNP): Today’s *Financial Times* carries a warning from the British Retail Consortium about the fear of food rotting at ports as a result of a no-deal Brexit. What is the Secretary of State doing about that, and how will he ensure that our ports are not left in chaos?

**Chris Grayling:** As I keep saying clearly, we do not intend to put in place measures that would create long incoming queues at our ports. Our ports successfully support inward trade from around the world, and in the post-Brexit world we have no intention of changing that.

**Mr Speaker:** Andrew Jones—I call Mr Jones.

**Andrew Jones** (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): You normally call me Andrew Jones, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** I did say Andrew Jones.

**Andrew Jones:** I beg your pardon.

**Mr Speaker:** Know thyself, man. Well done.

**Andrew Jones:** Thank you. May I first welcome today’s announcement of an HS2 depot in Leeds, which is welcome news for the northern powerhouse? The A59 at Kex Gill is an important trans-Pennine route, and its closure is impacting on residents and businesses in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend meet me to discuss what support the Government can provide to North Yorkshire County Council to carry out works on that site, including its potential re-routing?

**Mr Speaker:** I say gently to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Andrew Jones) that one of his most endearing qualities is his gentleness and modesty. However, he should not be quite so modest—he is, after all, a distinguished former Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for buses, and that was a motivational factor in my calling him to ask a supplementary at Transport questions.

**Jesse Norman:** I, too, share my hon. Friend’s delight at the news about the HS2 depot. I would be delighted to meet my distinguished former colleague.

**T7. [906294] Conor McGinn** (St Helens North) (Lab): Can the Secretary of State explain how the decision to award the Wales & Borders franchise is made solely by the Welsh Government? This is a main commuter route for my constituents into Manchester and Warrington, but we have no say over it. Is it not ludicrous that decisions about English rail passenger services are being made exclusively in Wales?

**Chris Grayling:** We have taken care—this is a genuine issue—to ensure that the Welsh Government, while they control the letting of the franchise, do not have the power to degrade services within England. That is very important. The Department holds clear responsibilities for making sure the Welsh do not take decisions that adversely affect the English.

**Justine Greening** (Putney) (Con): Heathrow flights are capped at 480,000 flights a year. That was set as a condition of the 2001 terminal 5 planning consent. Will the Secretary of State confirm that there are no plans to override the existing cap for existing runways?
Chris Grayling: I have had no requests to do so.

T8. [906295] Bampos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Many of my constituents have had to endure a consistently poor and wholly unacceptable train service from GTR-Great Northern since the new timetable was introduced on 20 May. Does the Minister agree that the time has come to end the franchise for GTR-Great Northern and allow the Mayor of London to take over the running of the service, so that my constituents can get into London to work, study and get on with their lives without travelling being such an ordeal?

Joseph Johnson: The service on GTR’s Thameslink services has indeed been unacceptable. A hard review is under way, which will give the Secretary of State all options when it concludes. With respect to the size of that franchise, the Secretary of State has also indicated that he is open to breaking it up once the Thameslink programme is in place and when that franchise comes to an end in 2021. He has had discussions with the Mayor of London about some services moving to Transport for London.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): We are approaching the summer and traffic will be driving down the M20. I am sure that you, like me, Mr Speaker, wish to have a speedy exit towards the coast. Will the Minister explain what he is doing on the smart motorways programme on the M20 to ensure not just that it works but that communities are protected from noise?

Jesse Norman: I am very glad my hon. Friend mentions noise, because that is a topic of great interest to us. We are actively exploring whether we can bring to local concerns about noise-capturing the same kind of concerns we are bringing to the structure of the highway.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): Delays, non-accessible platforms, cancelled trains, failed investment—would the Secretary of State like me to add broken promises of electrification to the list of issues with the trans-Pennine route for my constituents?

Chris Grayling: We have already modernised the line from Liverpool to Manchester and we are about to start a £3 billion modernisation of the railway line from Manchester to Leeds to York, so I make no apology to the people of the north for the fact that we are spending £3 billion on upgrading their railway line when the Labour party, when it was in office, did absolutely nothing.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): As we reach the halfway point through the Year of Engineering, will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking all those who have joined the campaign so far and encourage those who have yet to get on board to join up and make 2018 the success I know it can be?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I thank my hon. Friend. For his question, especially as he is the ambassador for the Year of Engineering. We are working with 1,400 companies up and down the country to create 1 million interactions to encourage young people to take STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths—and become engineers of the future.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): There are some excellent new businesses housed in railway arches on the Gateshead side of the High Level bridge, such as Block and Bottle, Arch Sixteen Café and the Station East Public House, but Network Rail is about to sell off the leasehold for 5,500 arches around the country. Will the Secretary of State meet me and the representatives group, Guardians of the Arches, to discuss proposals that will not ramp up rents for these new businesses and businesses around the country?

Joseph Johnson: Network Rail is in the process of managing its estate to ensure it contributes towards housing and commercial development where that is sensible. I would be delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman and the campaign group he mentions.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will the Minister update the House on what her Department is doing to investigate the use of distributed ledger technology, such as blockchain, in the maritime sector?

Ms Ghani: My hon. Friend, as you may be aware, Mr Speaker, is an intellect in blockchain, having published a report yesterday on unlocking blockchain. My officials explore new technologies such as blockchain, which may help to improve maritime trade. We have recently contributed to “Are You Decentralised Yet?”, a paper for the Transport Systems Catapult, analysing blockchain technologies and how they can benefit maritime.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): A few weeks ago, the Secretary of State for Transport said that he would be meeting the people from Newton in Bolsover regarding HS2 and the alternative to knocking down 30 houses. Will he repeat that at the Dispatch Box, in view of the altercation that took place at the last Transport questions? Do we not want another broken promise, do we?

Ms Ghani: I am not quite sure exactly what meeting the hon. Gentleman is talking about. Meetings take place between HS2 and the community engagement officers up and down the route. I believe that a meeting is already taking place, but this gives me an opportunity to remind Members from across the House of the importance of HS2, as well as the 100,000 jobs that it brings with it and that it connects eight of our 10 great cities.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): Earlier this year, a joint feasibility study conducted by South Gloucestershire Council and Highways England into a new M4 junction 18A recommended a western option at Emersons Green be adopted rather than an ill-thought-out eastern option that would cut through green-belt land. For the sake of local residents, will the Secretary of State now rule out this eastern option, which nobody supports and which now needs to be erased entirely?

Jesse Norman: As my hon. Friend will know, this topic is under active consideration and consultation at the moment.
Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I call Mr Jim Shannon—a short sentence, I feel sure.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It certainly will be, Mr Speaker. Accessibility on bus routes is important for disabled people; in particular, what has been done to help wheelchair users to access buses?

Mr Speaker: Splendid.

Ms Ghani: That very important question enables me to remind the sector and bus drivers that wheelchair spaces on buses are first and foremost for the use of wheelchair users, and other passengers must respect that.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): On the NHS’s 70th birthday, can I give you the present of a spare badge, Mr Speaker? It is for the NHS, to which my family have dedicated their entire working life.

On the subject of trains, will my right hon. Friend look at extending the delay-repay system to cover the circumstances when our very popular trains are so crowded that people cannot actually get on to them, just until our new trains arrive with the extra seats?

Joseph Johnson: We do hold train operating companies to account for capacity in our monthly review of how they are performing under the terms of their franchise agreement, and remedial plans are put in place to address overcrowding when that is found to exist.

Ged Killen (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I have written to the Secretary of State about my constituent who had no access to a toilet on a bus replacement service or at any of the stops along the route between Salford and Preston. She is a pregnant woman, and she was forced to wet herself and then sit on the floor of the train from Preston to Glasgow because it was overcrowded and delayed. Does the Secretary of State believe that she should be compensated for that indignity?

Ms Ghani: The inclusive transport strategy, which is due to be published, will look at issues around accessibility and toilets, especially looking at changing rooms and how we can make that information more available at the appropriate time when toilets are not functioning.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I declare my interest as a member of Kettering Borough Council. Now that Kettering Borough Council and Northamptonshire County Council have resolved their differences over how a new decriminalised parking system might operate, will the roads Minister issue the order to enable this to happen?

Jesse Norman: I will certainly have a further conversation with my hon. Friend about the question he raises.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Oh very well, it is always good to encourage a new young Member at the start of his parliamentary career. I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows very well that millions of our people are being poisoned by the filthy emissions from buses, trucks and cars. When is he going to do something about it?

Chris Grayling: Before I respond to that question, I just say to the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner) that I had been under the impression that the meeting was already organised. If that is not the case, I will make sure that it is.

On clean transport, this is a central part of the Government’s strategy. It is why we are spending money on supporting low-emission bus vehicles and on encouraging people to buy low-emission vehicles. When we publish our Road to Zero strategy shortly, we will be setting out more of our plans to create a greener vehicle fleet on our roads.

Mr Speaker: Order. Just before I call the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) to put his urgent question, I should remind the House—I hope it is a question of reminding the House—that I hope it is a question of reminding the House of something of which we have very considerable pressure on the parliamentary timetable today. There is of course the business question, and there are two ministerial statements, but I have also to have regard to the level of interest in the debate on proxy voting. This urgent question will therefore not run for longer than 20 minutes. The Front Benchers must stick to time; otherwise, I am afraid they will have to be sat down. After the expiry of that 20 minutes, that’s it—we will move on to the next business.
Universal Credit

10.40 am

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab) (Urgent Question): Will the Secretary of State please use this opportunity to apologise for the three instances where she has dissembled on the National Audit Office report on universal credit?

Mr Speaker: Order. That is rather naughty of the right hon. Gentleman. I will say that it was an innocent error, but he is an immensely experienced Member of this House whom we all treat with great respect. The proper form in these cases is simply to read out the urgent question that is listed, not to invest the question with a degree of rhetorical licence. Anyway, I think it was probably innocent.

Frank Field: Innocent.

Mr Speaker: Very well. We will let him off this occasion.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): I had information that the question was on the letter that I received yesterday, so that is obviously where we will be going: the letter that I received yesterday. Opening the letter was a comment about a meeting that the Comptroller and Auditor General had asked to have with me. He had written to me on 27 June. Our Department got back at the end of the week and that meeting will be on Monday. There was possibly an inference from that that I had not accepted a meeting or that there was not going to be one. That was not the case, and it is diarised for Monday.

The next bit was about the information we had received, and accurate up-to-date information being shared with the Department. We agreed that information had been shared up to 6 June, but when we signed off the factual information contained within the report, we raised concerns about the context and conclusions drawn from that information and where we went from there.

That goes on to the impact of the recent changes. We looked at the impact of the changes we brought through: waiting days being abolished on 14 February, the housing benefit run-on on 11 April, and advance payments on 3 January. As I said in my apology yesterday, the impact of those changes is still being felt and the definition therefore cannot be that it has been fully taken into account by the NAO. They also talked about slowing down the process, which we always agreed with. This is about the test and learn process, and we will learn as we go along. That is what we agree with, too. The Comptroller and Auditor General also said in his letter:

“I’m also afraid that your statement in response to my report claiming Universal Credit is working had not been proven.”

That is where we differ on the conclusions. While the NAO had the same factual information either way, we came to very different conclusions because the impact of the changes we brought in at the end of that period is still being felt.

So that is where I would like to leave it—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms McVey: At the end of the letter it says that “the Department cannot measure the exact number of additional people in employment.”

We agree with that. We cannot measure the exact number of people in employment, but we knew that there was a plausible range—which we had had support on—of people going into employment. We also know that employment is increasing. Those were the key pertinent points from the letter, and obviously included with my apology yesterday for the phrasing of the words I got wrong—which I fully accept, which is why I came to the House—I will end that bit of the statement there.

Frank Field: We are grateful for the Secretary of State’s apology—again—for one aspect of her behaviour where the Comptroller and Auditor General criticised her for dissembling. There were two others. First, she told the House that the Comptroller and Auditor General had advised her to roll out faster, whereas he told her to pause so that vulnerable claimants would not be hit further. Secondly, that universal credit is working is not proven, as she said, with 40% of claimants finding themselves in financial difficulty, 25% unable to make a claim online, and 20% overall, but two thirds of disabled claimants, not being paid on time and in full, hence the demand of the Comptroller and Auditor General, a big regulator in this country, for her to pause the universal credit programme.

Ms McVey: We need to separate two parts of this. One bit is where I came myself to the House to apologise for using the wrong words. I used the words “faster rate” and “speeded up” on the premise that the report had said there was no practical alternative but to continue with universal credit and that there had been a regrettable slowing down. My interpretation of that was incorrect, which is why I came to the House yesterday and apologised for my words. We should separate that from the impact of the changes. I said—and I stand by this—that the impact of the changes could not have been felt because it was still being rolled out and those impacts were still being felt and therefore could not have been taken into account. We need to separate where I used the incorrect words, for which I came to the House to apologise, from the impacts of the changes and therefore the conclusions that can be drawn.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): While my right hon. Friend has apologised, could she confirm that the Labour party has yet to apologise for its misleading statements—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: I am sorry but questions must be about the policy of the Government, not about other people not apologising for other things. [Interruption. Order.]

I do not need any help in these matters. I do have some experience. The hon. Lady is a most assiduous Member, but this is an exploration of Government policy and ministerial accountability to the House. It is not about the Opposition. Sorry, but that is the position.

Helen Whately rose—

Mr Speaker: No, the hon. Lady has already had one bite at the cherry. Let us have a masterclass from Sir Desmond Swayne.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Mr Speaker, if you complain to me that I am being too slow, am I unreasonable in assuming that you want me to go faster?
Ms McVey: I thank my right hon. Friend for the way he said that. That was my interpretation of what I read throughout the report. I therefore apologised when I checked on the words I had used—my interpretation, not the exact words in the report. I would say, however, on the subject of apologies, that I am more than happy to say, “Can I check on those words? Did I get them right? Did I get them wrong?” I then followed through: “What was the right process?” How did I do it? Nobody asked or told me to come to the House. I actually checked the words and came to the House.

Other people, it is true, have questioned and queried—even the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). Sometimes I think we are blessed in this House that the Opposition never get anything wrong, and other MPs do not get anything wrong. Whereas I am more than happy to come and apologise if I do, it seems that sometimes other people are not so happy to come forward and apologise. Perhaps what I did that was surprising to the House was to come of my volition and apologise for my words that were wrong.

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): The Secretary of State should be ashamed that she has been forced to come to the House again. Yesterday the Comptroller and Auditor General took the extraordinary step of writing an open letter to her pointing out that she had misrepresented the National Audit Office report on numerous occasions. He did so after she had failed to meet him, and she did not have the courtesy to do so before this point.

The NAO report is damning of the Government’s flagship social security policy, but, instead of responding to its findings, the Secretary of State misled the House over them. The report said that universal credit is not meeting the aims set for it, and that currently there is no evidence that it ever will. Why and how did the Secretary of State come to say falsely—on two separate occasions in Parliament—that the report had said that the roll-out of universal credit should be speeded up, that the report was out of date as it did not take account of changes made by the Government in the Budget, and that universal credit was working? How can these statements be inadvertent slips of the tongue?

In response to a point of order, the Secretary of State said that she had “meant to say that the NAO had said that there was no practical alternative to continuing with universal credit.”—[Official Report, 4 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 321.]

That is quite different from saying that it should be speeded up. In fact, the report states clearly that the Government should “ensure that the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes”.

Has the Secretary of State ever read the NAO report? If she has, how can she have drawn the conclusions that she has?

The Secretary of State has failed to apologise in relation to the other two key points made by the Comptroller and Auditor General in his letter. Will she now do so? If she misread the report so badly, this brings into question her competence and her judgment. If she read the report and chose to misrepresent its findings, she has clearly broken the ministerial code. Either way, she should resign.

Ms McVey: Let me start from the top again. I did not fail to meet the Comptroller and Auditor General. As I have said, the letter came in on 27 June, which was last Wednesday; our office got back to him at the end of the week, and I am seeing him on Monday. So that was not correct.

As I have said, I came to the House and apologised for my interpretation of what was there and the words that I had used. My right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), who is no longer in the Chamber, referred to how something could be interpreted.

As I also explained, we agreed on the factual information all the way through, but it is a question of how you interpret that information, with the judgments, the summaries and the context. It was on that basis that we said, “We do not agree. We do not agree on how the findings come out together.” As I said, the effects of the significant changes that the Government had introduced this year cannot have been fully taken into account, because they are still being rolled out.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for her apology. Like a number of other Members, I was very disappointed that the NAO report did not take account of the changes that the Department brought in on the basis of the recommendations made by the Select Committee. Will the Secretary of State confirm that she will continue to adapt and improve universal credit as new ideas and new evidence emerge?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend is right. That is one of the key points, because this is one of the biggest changes in benefits. We always said that the slow roll-out would reflect the changes needed, and within the last couple of weeks, I have made significant changes yet again. Whether they involved kinship carers, 18 to 21-year-olds and housing benefit or severe disability premiums, I made those changes after listening to people. Again, the impacts will not have taken effect yet because they are still being rolled out.

I agree that sometimes we have to do a “mea culpa”, hands up, as I did yesterday. I had the wrong words, I apologised to the House, and the apology was accepted by the House. Equally, I am more than happy and prepared when colleagues on either side of the House say, “Could you look at this? Can we look at it a bit more? Could you change this?” and have made significant changes to this policy since I became Secretary of State.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Secretary of State appears to be willing to mislead Parliament and to get into a fight with the National Audit Office in order to protect her failing universal credit policy, but what she and none of her colleagues will admit is that the NAO report blows a hole as wide as the Clyde through everything the Tories have been saying on universal credit. The NAO felt forced into writing an open letter to put this matter straight, and I understand that this is Sir Amyas Morse’s first such letter in over a decade in service. This is an absolutely shameful state of affairs. We can all accept honest error, but the Comptroller and Auditor General points out in his letter that a
number of the statements that the Secretary of State has made are without evidence, are not correct and are not proven.

Mr Speaker: Thank you.

Alison Thewliss: This is not about phrasing, as the Secretary of State has said, because speeding up is not the same as pausing. Did she actually read the National Audit Office report before her recent attendance in the House? And—

Mr Speaker: Thank you. [Interruption.] Order. I am a little disconcerted to see the SNP Front-Bench spokesman gesturing at me as if to say, “What’s going on?” Forgive me, but I did say to the House very clearly that—[Interruption.] Order. It is no good shaking your head, I say to the hon. Lady, who is an extremely dextrous and committed Member of this House. She had a minute; she consumed her minute and I then move on. That is the right thing to do.

Ms McVey: We looked at the business case and looked through the conclusions, and for the £2 billion invested, there will be a £34 billion benefit to the UK economy over the next 10 years. We also foresee an increase in employment of 200,000. We believe that that is within the plausible range.

People want evidence, and we can give evidence about the changes this Government have brought through when we talk about getting people into work. We know we have got over 3.2 million people into work and we know we have got 600,000 disabled people into work in the last few years. At the time, we heard the assertions from Opposition Members. Labour said that 1 million people were on benefits and lots of people were not in work. To be in this position of being able to help people to get a job is what I want. It is disconcerting and upsetting that people sometimes, just for the sheer sake of opposing, want to change good measures that are helping over 3.2 million people into work. Those are the facts; that is what we know. Conservative Members are trying to improve people’s lives.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I do want to accommodate a few more questioners and we must work on that basis.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): Jobcentre staff across my constituency where universal credit has already been fully rolled out inform me that claimants are more likely to get into work as a result of being on universal credit. Is that a trend across the country, because that would mean it is really good that we are rolling it out, at whatever speed that might be?

Ms McVey: That is what is coming out from the data we are gathering about what real people are saying about how universal credit impacts on their lives. My hon. Friend is right to say that people are getting into work faster, staying in work longer, and looking for work. For those in work, the data shows that on average people are earning an extra £600 a year. Those are the positive effects of this benefit change.

Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): I am staggered and disappointed that in answer to the urgent question we have a Secretary of State who is still arguing over the detail of a report. This is an important constitutional issue. The National Audit Office is the independent watchdog of Government spending. In this case, the Secretary of State has come to the House twice and there has been an unprecedented letter from the Comptroller and Auditor General. I have had two letters from the permanent secretary adding information on what was an agreed report on 8 June. Just for the record, will the Secretary of State declare clearly in the House today that she has full confidence in the National Audit Office and the Comptroller and Auditor General?

Ms McVey: What I would say is: they do their job. He came forward—[Interruption.] We need to separate this out. We said that we shared information. We agreed on that factual information. What we said is that we had made significant changes at the latter end of that period when information was collected, and therefore the impact of that could not have been felt. Obviously, I am meeting the Comptroller and Auditor General next week. That is what is important.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I commend the Secretary of State’s work in the Department—she has shown a great commitment to improving the lives of people across the country. Does she agree that the Department’s decision to take an incremental approach to the development of universal credit is exactly the right approach, and that we must cut through all this political nonsense and focus on the delivery of universal credit?

Ms McVey: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Like most other people here, I came into politics to help people into work, probably because when I grew up in Liverpool in the ’80s it was a difficult place to grow up and lots of people were not in work. To be in this position of being able to help people to get a job is what I want. It is disconcerting and upsetting that people sometimes, just for the sheer sake of opposing, want to change good measures that are helping over 3.2 million people into work. Those are the facts; that is what we know. Conservative Members are trying to improve people’s lives.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): At Monday’s Question Time, I asked the Secretary of State two questions. On Question 5, when I asked whether she would accept the National Audit Office’s recommendation that universal credit should not be rolled out further, she said:

“The NAO made clear quite the opposite”.—[Official Report, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 8.]

It did not. At topical questions, I asked her to reconsider. I quoted the NAO report, but she stuck to her position. On both occasions, she told the House something that she knew was not correct. Will she apologise to me and to the House, and will she accept the NAO’s recommendation that the roll-out should be stopped now?

Ms McVey: When I answered the right hon. Gentleman’s questions, I said that the National Audit Office had said that there was no practical alternative to continuing with universal credit—that was how I answered. I will pay the right hon. Gentleman a compliment. It was due to his persistence that after I left the House I went back
and said, “I’ve used these words.” I know that this is about the impact, and I know that what I said was substantially correct, but I wanted to double check. So I double checked whether I had used the wrong words, and it was after that that I made the apology, because my interpretation, although it was right, was not based on the exact words. That is what I came to apologise for. However, I stand by the fact that the impact of our changes could not have been felt and, as the NAO said, there is no practical alternative but to continue through and the slowness with which this has gone is regrettable.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): When I visited Stockport jobcentre and met its work coaches, I found an enthusiastic group of people who are keen to make a difference to people’s lives. Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating them and all jobcentre workers across the country who are so enthusiastic about transforming lives and making a difference?

Ms McVey: Everybody wants to improve people’s lives. That is what we are all here to do, and that is what our work coaches do day in, day out. I hope that you will bear with me, Mr Speaker, if I refer to a letter I received. A lone parent wrote saying, “I was frightened to go into the jobcentre from what I had heard. Eight years ago, I was in the jobcentre, and the system did not work for me, so I was relieved and happy that I now have a job. Universal credit is working.” Since then, I have been collecting all those letters, because so many people—claimants and work coaches—are saying that this system is so much better than the one before.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): I suspect that the Secretary of State decided that she had to come to the House to apologise when she received the unprecedented open letter from the Comptroller and Auditor General pointing out that she had used—let us say—not correct assertions on three occasions about a report that her own Department confirmed to the NAO on 6 June that its report was based on the most accurate and up-to-date information, yet the other day she indicated that the NAO report could be out of date. I think that that is unacceptable.

Ms McVey: Again, if I may correct the hon. Gentleman, we had agreed that that information was coming forward. What we have said is that the changes this Government have made were done in January, February and April, and therefore those changes could not be taken fully into account—those impacts are still being felt—because the period of checking was from last year to April of this year.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Like my right hon. Friend, I grew up in Liverpool in the 1980s and have a particular sensitivity to the problems caused by unemployment. Both the jobcentres that serve my constituents are fully supportive of the roll-out of universal credit, so will she maintain her focus on rolling out universal credit as the best way to help people into work and to help people in work?

Ms McVey: I did not know my hon. Friend also spent his formative years in Liverpool. There are so many Conservative Members who spent their formative years and grew up in Liverpool. [Interruption.] I smile because there are so many of us even in this Department.

My hon. Friend is quite right. This is what we are about: getting more people into work, which we have done—and significantly so. Now we are reaching out to help even more people, significantly so.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): For eight years Parliament’s only reliable information about the status of universal credit has come from the National Audit Office. Ministers have consistently responded with denials and cover-up statements that, as the Secretary of State has acknowledged this week, were simply untrue. Might her apology herald a new openness about the very real problems with the universal credit project?

Ms McVey: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning my openness and the fact that I was willing, by myself, to come and apologise for using the wrong words. People who know me will always say about me that I am open, that I am straight and that I say it as it is, which I will do. Equally, if we need to make more changes, which I have done from the moment I got here—I did not seek leave to appeal to the Court of Appeal because I did not feel it would have been right; and I looked at the position of kinship carers and did not think it was right, so we changed it, as we did for the 18-to-21 group—I am more than happy to change things when we can, if we can.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): The NAO report notes that jobcentre staff have said that universal credit systems have “improved significantly” since they were first introduced. Will my right hon. Friend join me in thanking Sedgemoor District Council and other councils among
the first tranche to adopt universal credit for the quality of the feedback they have given, which has allowed those improvements to be delivered?

Ms McVey: I thank my hon. Friend, because nobody can do this in isolation or by themselves. We need the local councils to be on board, we need the housing associations to be on board and we need MPs to be on board—we need everybody supporting the most vulnerable. I thank him for that comment, and he is quite correct.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Does the Secretary of State agree with the National Audit Office that universal credit is moving people into debt and that the first debt is rent arrears? Claimants are not getting their rent paid and housing providers find out that a person is on universal credit only when they are in arrears. Is that not a reason why universal credit should be paused?

Ms McVey: Some of the key changes that were done during this year were the advances to provide extra support if people were in need of extra money and the two-week run-on in housing benefit. So we learnt, changed and adapted. Those things have been brought in, but only this year. Therefore, again, their impacts cannot have been felt. But we listened, we learnt, we altered and we have done.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I allowed some injury time on two accounts. The first was that I had to intervene a number of times in regularising the debate. The second was that I wanted to facilitate a reasonable number of questions, so I ran the urgent question for half an hour, rather than for 20 minutes. I am sorry that some colleagues are disappointed, but I think that was a reasonable treatment of the issue. I gather that the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) has a point of order, which seems to me to be very reasonable. We have had a half-hour day before yesterday about coming here yesterday. She is it in order for her not to write to me, as the Member concerned, to tell me that she was making a statement or demerits of policy or even, outside the Chamber, of conduct. Suffice it to say that the Secretary of State did approach me and offered to come to the House yesterday, which she did. [ Interruption. ] She approached me the day before yesterday about coming here yesterday. She has come here today and we have had a half-hour exchange, which seems to me to be very reasonable. We must now move on to the next business.

11.11 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom): The business for next week will include:

MONDAY 9 JULY—Consideration of a business of the House motion, followed by proceedings on the Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill, followed by a motion to approve a money resolution on the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill.

TUESDAY 10 JULY—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill, followed by motion to approve Standing Orders relating to the European Statutory Instruments Committee, followed by Opposition day (unallotted half day). There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Liberal Democrats, subject to be announced, followed by a debate on a motion relating to the appointment of external members to the House of Commons Commission.

WEDNESDAY 11 JULY—Opposition day (16th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “Build it in Britain shipbuilding”, followed by a debate on blue light emergency services. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 12 JULY—Debate on a motion on the practice of forced adoption in the UK, followed by general debate on lessons from the collapse of Carillion. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 13 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 16 July will include:

MONDAY 16 JULY—Remaining stages of the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill.

TUESDAY 17 JULY—Remaining stages of the Trade Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariff Cap) Bill, followed by Opposition day (15th allotted half day, part 2). There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 19 JULY—Debate on a motion on the independent complaints and grievance policy, followed by business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

FRIDAY 20 JULY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 23 July will include:

MONDAY 23 JULY—General debate, subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 24 JULY—Business to be nominated by the Backbench Business Committee.

I am delighted to wish the NHS a very happy 70th birthday. We are building an NHS for the future, ensuring it will be there for all of our children and grandchildren, just as it has been there for us. Today, we thank all the nurses and doctors, and all of our hard-working NHS staff for the extraordinary work they do, helping more people to live longer, healthier lives.
I am sure that everyone will want to join me in sending our best wishes to all who are taking part in the Pride celebrations in London this weekend.

Although I am a bit suspicious that the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) may be practising his Swedish, I am hopeful that the whole House will join me in wishing England the very best of luck in their quarter final against Sweden on Saturday.

Finally, I am immensely proud that in my own constituency this weekend is the world-famous British grand prix at Silverstone. I wish all the teams and drivers the very best.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for the forthcoming business, which I think takes us up to the recess, and for the two Opposition days. I suppose it is too cheeky and too early to ask for the Easter recess dates, but perhaps the Leader of the House could say when the next Queen’s Speech will be.

Given that Defence Question Time was moved, without the courtesy of letting business managers know, from its slot after the NATO summit and the publication of the modernising defence programme reports, may we have a debate on the summit and the reports? Or should we ring the Secretary of State for Defence so that he can ask Siri?

We now have a third option for the post-Brexit arrangement, although there was no clue in the Prime Minister’s statement on Monday as to what it is and how it will work. It will be an interesting house party tomorrow—I assume the Leader of the House will also be there—and they may end up playing Cluedo. It will be a Cabinet Minister, in the dining room, with the White Paper. [Interruption.] Those who have played it will know. Presumably, one side will take Sharpies to redact it and the other side will take highlighters to accept the good parts.

Yet again, the House is the last to know about the business. On Monday, a journalist tweeted about the publication of the White Paper, saying that “it looks like the White Paper has been pencilled in for July 12th, the very day that Donald Trump arrives in the UK.”

Again, the courtesies to the House are not being followed. None of the Opposition business managers knew when the White Paper was going to be published. Will the Leader of the House confirm when it will be published and may we have a statement on it? Might I suggest the 23 July, when it seems there is a spare slot for a general debate? It would be possible to debate the White Paper then.

It is not clear how this third way will affect the Irish border and what will happen in respect of alignment. The Prime Minister is yet to visit the border; perhaps the away-day party could go there en masse. I met a farmer at the farmers market in Parliament last week, and he told me that his farm straddles the north and the Republic; what will happen to him? The Prime Minister said on Monday:

“In a no-deal situation, it will of course be up to the United Kingdom to determine what it does in relation to the border in Northern Ireland.”—[Official Report, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 59.]

That is not correct: there is more than one party on either side of the border and more than one party in the negotiations.

The Leader of the House congratulated the NHS on its 70th anniversary, and we do, too. It was the courage of Nye Bevan and the determination of a Labour Government that saw the birth of the NHS, which has completely transformed social justice in this country.

Why did the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care not come to the House to give a list of the 17 operations that are to be cancelled? I am sure that Members have read that list. I have had carpal tunnel syndrome—what would have happened to me? Would I not have been allowed to have that operation? Would I have had to ask for it? The Secretary of State is hiding behind the head of NHS England. May we have a statement from him on another step to privatisation and to explain the reasons why those 17 operations are on that list? Perhaps he could extend the consultation period over the summer.

While the Conservatives are dining at the Hurlingham Club, the country is falling apart on their watch. I am not going to go over the urgent question on universal credit, but suffice it to say that, as the National Audit Office said, the Government’s flagship universal credit programme has not delivered value for money, and it is impossible to know whether it will help to get people off benefits and into work. We need a proper debate so that we can find out who said what to whom and who understood what about the report. We need that debate, so may we have it as soon as possible?

What about a debate on the Public Accounts Committee report that said:

“After seven years of government funding reductions totalling nearly 50% and rising demand for services, local authorities are under real strain. Key services that support vulnerable people, such as social care and housing, are now under enormous pressure.”

Funding cuts have reduced public services such as libraries, waste collection and bus services. Our high streets are dying. Marks & Spencer and Poundworld are leaving Walsall town centre. High street names are either closing stores, or they are in administration.

What about students? Again, I raise the plight of our poor students. The House of Commons Library provided my hon. Friend the Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) with some analysis that showed that the Government are causing more debt to students because of their use of the retail price index to apply interest to their student loans. Switching to CPI would result in £16,000 less interest being added over 30 years. We need a statement on what the Government will do to alleviate this debt.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen North (Kirsty Blackman) told me that there will be a memorial event in the Piper Alpha memorial garden in Hazelhead park on Friday evening. It is the 30th anniversary of the Piper Alpha explosion. The names of the 167 people who died in that explosion will be read out. Frank Dorman, the former Labour MP for Aberdeen North, was assiduous in fighting for improved safety standards in the North sea.

I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing the Library to use Speaker’s House last Monday. There was a fantastic celebration of 200 years of the Library, and fantastic memorabilia were on display. I thank Penny Young and all her staff for the fabulous work that they put in there. I also thank other Members of the House: EqualTeas has recorded 107,000 people taking part and 3,000 tea parties—that is an average of 4.5 tea
[Valerie Vaz]

[Valerie Vaz]

parties per constituency. The pack was brilliant. David Clark, the head of education and engagement, and his team of Michelle, Rob, Beryl, Emma and Charles should be congratulated. It is an excellent and inspiring way to engage the public in celebrating Parliament and equality.

Andrea Leadsom: I start by absolutely agreeing with the hon. Lady. That the EqualiT eas effort has been fantastic. We are all thoroughly enjoying it. I very much enjoyed cutting the first cake, which had this wonderful teapot on the top. It is wonderful to think of those very smartly dressed ladies 100 years ago primly having tea, but plotting on how to get the vote. It shows what can be done when we really try.

I also join the hon. Lady in commemorating the awful Piper Alpha disaster. It is right that we should remember it. I remember going on to a North sea oil rig when I was Energy Minister and realising how very vulnerable I was, so I absolutely join with her in that commemoration. She asked about future dates, and, of course, I will bring them forward as soon as I can. She also asked about defence questions being moved with Home Office questions. I sincerely apologise if she felt that there was any attempt to mislead in any way. The new oral questions rota was issued more than a fortnight ago, which I do consider is sufficient time for hon. Members to familiarise themselves with it. It was felt to be important that Defence Ministers were able to attend the opening day of the Farnborough air show, which is a very important day in the calendar for the Defence Department.

The hon. Lady asked about the Cabinet away-day. I can tell her that I am very much looking forward to it. I do not think there will be time for Cluedo, but I expect that there will be some very interesting discussions. The White Paper she mentioned will, of course, be brought forward just as soon as it can be. The Prime Minister has said before the summer recess; that is not too long ago, which I do consider is sufficient time for hon. Members to familiarise themselves with it. It was felt to be important that Defence Ministers were able to attend the opening day of the Farnborough air show, which is a very important day in the calendar for the Defence Department.

The hon. Lady asked about universal credit. As she knows, we have just had an urgent question on that topic, so I do not propose to spend a lot of time on it other than to say that universal credit is intended to be a much simpler and more effective benefit. It does work for people. The Leader of the Opposition likes to use examples, so let me say that Nayim from Lancashire has said, “Universal credit gave me the flexibility to take on additional hours without the stress of thinking that this might stop my benefit straight away.” Roberta from Yorkshire, who had mental health issues, is now in work and loving it, and says, “My work coach helped turn my life around. He tailored his support to my situation and thanks to him I have found my dream job.” Real people’s lives are being improved by universal credit, and that is absolutely the point of it.

The hon. Lady said that local authorities are under strain. She will appreciate that this Government have sought since 2010 to get to a point where our economy is again living within its means and is succeeding. Just last week, BAE Systems won a £20 billion contract to build nine top warships for Australia. A business survey shows that we remain the No. 1 destination for foreign direct investment in Europe. Tech businesses attracted nearly $8 billion of funding last year—double the amount received in 2016. Employment is up to another record high, real wages are growing and the OECD is upgrading our growth forecast. What further evidence does the hon. Lady need to see that it is this Government who are taking the steps necessary to turn around our economy, and ensure that we can survive and thrive?

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the inequalities of the provision of personal independence payments for blind people? There seems to be a disparity in the age at which the payments can be made.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is mentioning an important and serious question, and mentions disparities about the age at which payments can be made to blind people. I assure him that new claims for PIP are available for claimants aged between 16 and 64, regardless of their health condition or disability. Where a claimant is in receipt of PIP, they can continue to receive it after the age of 65, providing that they continue to meet the eligibility criteria.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week, and join in with the 70th birthday wishes to our amazing national health service. I am particularly proud that in Scotland we have the best performing NHS in the whole United Kingdom. I also note what the shadow Leader of the House said about the Piper Alpha disaster 30 years ago today; it is an event that we should remember.

To the Leader of the House, “Heja Sverige!” We were brought up in the ’60s and ’70s in Scotland at the height of Jimmy Hill-ism, and it is really hard to love the English football team because of that particular experience.

I do not know whether the Leader of the House is down as an “accept” at the Chequers get-together tomorrow, but I have a sneaking suspicion about which side she is on in this great Cabinet battle of Brexit. It is now open warfare, with the Brexiteers lining up to rubbish the latest delusional proposal. I am just wondering whether the House will get the opportunity to debate this fantastical “third way” solution that the Prime Minister is promoting before the EU27 once again reject it out of hand.

Surely it is now time for electronic voting. I understand that some of my Conservative friends got just a wee bit upset on Tuesday evening about having to vote on our estimates process. Apparently, just doing their job got in the way of being able to cheer on the English national football team. Apparently it was all the fault of us nasty Scots Nats for daring to vote in a parliamentary democracy. How dare we? Well, salvation is on its way and there is a solution available for my footy-fixated Tory friends: stop wandering round and round aimlessly for 20 minutes in a headcount in stuffed Division Lobbies, introduce some modern voting facilities and come into the 21st century.
That would save England having to be eliminated on penalties so that Conservative Members can continue to do their business in this Parliament.

Lastly, this Tory dark money scandal is simply not going away. We now know the address of the murky Scottish Unionist Association Trust and we know its trustees, but we still do not know how it got its money, where that money was invested and why it was not properly registered with the Electoral Commission. It stinks to high heaven and the Scottish Tories are going to have to come clean some time very soon.

Andrea Leadsom: I can absolutely assure the hon. Gentleman that the side that I am on—at Chequers or anywhere—is the side of the United Kingdom. May I gently ask the hon. Gentleman whose side he is on? That is the question that he and his colleagues need to answer.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman’s question about electronic voting, I would observe that Scottish National party Members certainly should not be playing in the World cup due to the slowness of the 33 of them going through the Lobby—they showed no ability to sprint. It is entirely in order for them to vote at all times, as was pointed out on the day. Nevertheless, the Serjeant at Arms having to go twice into the Lobby to find out what was causing such a delay in the 33 of them staggering through prevented not only those in the Chamber who wanted to watch the football from doing so, but the Doorkeepers and the many other staff who support us. It was just plain mean to do that.

In response to the hon. Gentleman’s point about donations, I can tell him that the Scottish Conservative party has recorded all donations in line with the law.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): The current legal framework on referendums was based on two reports—the Nairn commission report on the conduct of referendums in 1996 and the report by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in 1998. The rules on referendums have not been updated for 20 years. Will the Leader of the House consider giving us a debate on the rules on referendums, particularly in the light of the fact that on Monday the report of the Independent Commission on Referendums, which I have been pleased to play a part in, is coming out? It was put together by the UCL constitution unit under the leadership of Meg Russell. We will have an opportunity to look at some of the suggestions on updating the rules on referendums, particularly with regard to social media and all the reports of people interfering with the process. I hope that she will take this request seriously and that we can have a detailed debate on the potential new rules that we could have surrounding this important part of our democracy.

Andrea Leadsom: I thank my right hon. Friend for her contribution to that debate. I certainly look forward to seeing the report. She may wish to raise her specific issue at Electoral Commission questions next Thursday.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business right up until the recess on 24 July. I can let the House know that we have already pre-determined that on 19 July the business nominated by the Backbench Business Committee will be the first anniversary of the tobacco control plan and smoking policy. I suspect that our determination of the business for 24 July will come this Tuesday. I hope that the hon. Member for Southend West (Sir David Amess) will be happy with the outcome of that.

Yesterday in Prime Minister’s questions, my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne Central (Chi Onwurah) invited the Prime Minister to Newcastle for the great exhibition of the north. Of course, that is in both Newcastle and Gateshead, so I would like to extend that invitation to all Members to visit Newcastle and Gateshead for the great exhibition of the north. On the Gateshead side of the river, they can visit the Baltic Centre, the Sage Gateshead and the By the River Brew Co., all of which can be accessed via the Gateshead Millennium bridge—so welcome to Gateshead as well.

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, we all love to celebrate the great exhibition of the north and seize the opportunities to visit when we can. I am certainly looking into whether I could possibly get there; I would very much like to do so.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): My constituents are currently being denied their legal rights to inspect the accounts of their local authority. Taunton Deane Borough Council’s spending data is currently a whole year out of date. My constituents have only a 30-day period in which to inspect the accounts. The council has blamed—believe it or not—a computer error. I am afraid that this is outrageous. The chief executive and the leader are wholly responsible, but the Government do have a duty on this. May we please have a debate in Government time on the ability of local councils to fulfil their statutory obligations to my constituents and many others?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises a very important and detailed point. I recommend that he raise it directly with Ministers or at Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on 23 July.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): The national lottery is not fit for purpose. How can it be right that, in the same year, Ashfield gets £900,000, while a city constituency a few miles down the road gets £64 million? May we have a debate in Government time on how to ensure that our former coalfield communities get their fair share from the lottery?

Andrea Leadsom: I would like to pay tribute to all those who buy lottery tickets and to the amazing achievements of the lottery in supporting good causes around the country. The hon. Lady makes an important point, and I suggest she seek an Adjournment debate, so that she can raise that matter.

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Sylvia Plath, speaking of her beloved son, said: “There is no guile or warp in him. May he keep so.”

In our time, our children are being warped by online gambling. The Gambling Commission reports that 25,000 children in Britain are problem gamblers and that a number of online gambling vehicles are predatory, using techniques to make children spend. Will the Leader of
the House arrange for a Minister to make a statement or perhaps even hold a debate, to ensure that we take seriously this great menace? Graham Greene said:

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

We can condemn our children to a future that is bitter and bleak, or we can craft a future that is joyful, hopeful and wonderful.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman’s book learning is legendary, as is his willingness generously to share it with us.

Andrea Leadsom: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this appalling situation. I have seen myself with my own kids that when young children are playing a game, they are encouraged not to use actual money, because they do not have any, but to get addicted to the idea of buying some extra beads or something else to enable them to play that game even better. I have experience of that, and I share his grave concern. He will be aware that Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Ministers are determined to keep children safe online and are doing all they can to tackle the issue. He may wish to seek a Backbench Business debate to look at what more can be done to protect young children.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): In the southern part of Syria at this moment, over a quarter of a million civilians are being bombed and attacked by Russia’s air force and the Assad regime. Is it not time we had another debate in this House on the crimes that are going on in Syria and the failure of the international community, including this country, to do anything about it?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is quite right that this is an ongoing catastrophe. The conflict is now in its eighth year, and the UN estimates that more than 400,000 people have been killed and over half the population has been displaced. He is right to raise that, and he may well wish to take it up with Defence Ministers on Monday during oral questions. The UK can be very proud that we are the second largest bilateral donor to the humanitarian response in Syria. We have now committed more than £2.7 billion to the Syria donor to the humanitarian response in Syria. We have a statement early next week from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government arising from his statement to the Local Government Association conference this week, where he said he had “no intention of forcing reorganisation on local government where it isn’t wanted or needed”?

As you know, Mr Speaker, reorganisation is neither wanted nor needed in Christchurch, where 17,676 people voted against it in a local referendum. If the Secretary of State came to the House to make a statement, it would give him an opportunity to withdraw the opposition he continues to make in the High Court to Christchurch’s case against the Government. If the Government now withdraw their opposition to Christchurch, we could all live happily.

Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this constituency issue again. He will be aware that Housing, Communities and Local Government questions will take place on Monday 23 July, and that is obviously a question that is best directed straight to the Secretary of State.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Mr Speaker, some years ago, you and I visited southern Sudan. When the country of South Sudan obtained independence, we hoped it would have a better future. Sadly, a crisis of biblical proportions is going on there, with famine, warfare and everything else. Will the Leader of the House call an urgent debate on South Sudan, so that we can raise the implications of the latest failure of the peace talks, with all its repercussions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman refers to another humanitarian crisis in a part of the world that the UK is strongly seeking to support and in which the UK is
endeavouring to find peaceful ways forward. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss progress directly with a Foreign Office Minister.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): I am delighted to inform the House that Erewash has topped the Which? magazine food hygiene survey, with 97% of medium and high-risk food retailers now compliant. Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a significant achievement both for the food inspection and enforcement team at Erewash Borough Council and for local food retailers in my constituency? Will she consider holding a debate in Government time to highlight the important contribution that the food sector makes to our high streets?

Andrea Leadsom: I am very pleased to congratulate Erewash on this achievement. It is fantastic for my hon. Friend’s local council, but also for local food retailers. She is right to point out that local authorities across the UK are responsible for regulating food businesses to make sure that the food we eat is safe. She is also right that the sector makes a huge contribution to our high streets, and I encourage her to apply for a Westminster Hall debate or an Adjournment debate to raise further the contribution it makes.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): May we have a debate on ministerial accountability? Many of my constituents who claim universal credit or other benefits but innocently get it wrong are sanctioned. Why do they think there is one rule for the Minister responsible for this and another rule for them?

Andrea Leadsom: I again say that universal credit is designed to be a better, much simpler benefit that enables more people to get into work. The Department for Work and Pensions has sought to listen to all the views expressed on both sides of the House over many months and to ensure wherever we can that we improve the service to claimants to make the experience for them much better. We will continue to listen to the experience and feedback and to improve the system so that it helps more people to get back into work.

Mrs Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden) (Con): Headteachers in my constituency and representatives from Anglia Ruskin University have raised multiple concerns about unconditional offers being given to students ill-equipped to cope with rigorous undergraduate programmes. May we have a Back-Bench debate to explore that issue further?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend raises an important and serious issue, and the Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation has been clear about the need for rigorous standards. Universities and the entire higher education sector should do all they can to encourage a diverse range of people to access the higher education system, and my hon. Friend might wish to raise her specific point through an Adjournment debate.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): The welcome Gilligan report on cycling came out this week and included recommendations for major investment in Oxford. May we please have a debate on that important issue?

Andrea Leadsom: I know how important cycling infrastructure is to the hon. Lady’s constituency, and the Government welcome Andrew Gilligan’s report for the National Infrastructure Commission on that subject. We want cycling and walking to become the natural choice of transport for people of all ages and backgrounds, particularly in urban areas, and we are determined to make it safer and easier. I would recommend that the hon. Lady apply for an Adjournment debate, but I understand she has already done so.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): The whole country has rightly been celebrating three Tottenham players putting four penalties past an Arsenal goalkeeper this week. May I draw the House’s attention to the fact that the European Parliament is today debating the EU copyright directive, which will have incredible implications for internet users and also protect artists’ copyright? Will my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate in the House on that issue, which is of the utmost importance to our future?

Andrea Leadsom: Would you like to confirm your delight at the performance of those Spurs players, Mr Speaker? Not sure. On my hon. Friend’s substantive question, that is indeed an important topic, and having heard from the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, I suspect there will be the opportunity to raise such a matter for debate in the pre-recess Adjournment debate.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): On 10 May, I asked the Leader of the House, on behalf of my constituent, Heather Cameron, for a debate on pensions. Heather Cameron is in the Gallery today, so may I ask the right hon. Lady whether there will be time before the summer recess for a binding vote to secure justice for those women born in the 1950s who have been robbed of their state pensions?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have just read out the business up to the summer recess. There will be opportunities for Adjournment debates and Westminster Hall debates in the usual way, and I encourage him to seek such a debate. I also encourage him to bear in mind that the Government have already sought to minimise the impact of these measures on the personal pensions of women born during the 1950s.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): May we have a debate on the NHS? As we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the NHS, Moray has received a bitter blow. NHS Grampian has said that maternity services at Dr Gray’s Hospital in Elgin will be downgraded for up to 18 months, so hundreds of pregnant women will have to travel to Aberdeen or Inverness to give birth, rather than do so locally in Moray. Does my right hon. Friend agree with local campaigns, such as the Keep MUM campaign, which says that the proposals raise grave concerns about the safety of pregnant women, babies and sick children?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is right, of course, to raise the importance of having local, good-quality care for pregnant mums, and the opportunity for women to deliver their babies safely and close to home is key.
[Andrea Leadsom]

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his determination to campaign for such things in his constituency, and I wish him and the Keep MUM campaign every success.

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): This week marks the 40th anniversary of when my secretary, Linda Spencer, first came to work at the House of Commons. I would like to thank Linda for all her hard work on my behalf and that of former colleagues, Gisela Stuart and the late John Fraser. Does the Leader of the House think she might find time for a short debate in which we can pay tribute to the hard work of all the staff—cleaners, catering staff, secretaries, researchers, admin workers, doormen and women, Hansard reporters, Clerks, librarians, maintenance workers, and police and security staff—because without their hard work, we could not possibly carry out our duties on behalf of our constituents?

Mr Speaker: Order. I just say to the hon. Gentleman that I am very much aware of this matter and that a letter from me will be winging its way to Linda Spencer today.

Andrea Leadsom: I join you, Mr Speaker, in paying tribute to her for her many long years of service. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise the fact that all the support staff right across the Palace of Westminster enable us to do our work and we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. I encourage him to make his points more fully in the pre-recess Adjournment debate.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): Last weekend, I attended an excellent EqualiTeas event organised by Bramhall and Woodford guides. I discovered that across my constituency hundreds of children are waiting to go into guides and scouts, but that a lack of volunteers is preventing them from doing so. Will my right hon. Friend join me, as a former beaver leader, in recognising the importance of the valuable work scouting and guiding volunteers do? Perhaps there could be a debate on this.

Andrea Leadsom: Yes. My hon. Friend raises the absolutely vital work of volunteers in all sorts of youth groups—beavers is just one of them. There is no doubt that across all our communities volunteering enables young people to have different opportunities and experiences, and that is very much appreciated. I certainly encourage my hon. Friend to seek an Adjournment debate, so she can pay her own tribute to them.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The drug death figures for Scotland have just come out and they are absolutely shocking: they have increased since the 2016 figures. Will the Government arrange for a debate in Government time on their failing drug strategy, which is not supporting my constituents or people in Scotland?

Andrea Leadsom: I am incredibly sorry to hear about the drug statistics. I am not aware of them, but the hon. Lady might like to raise this matter directly with the Secretary of State for Scotland at Scotland questions next week. I can certainly assure her that the Government are very conscious of the need to get rid of the scourge of illegal drug-taking and the massive damage it causes to people’s lives.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Mr Speaker, I know you have been a great supporter of Guide Dogs. Many right hon. and hon. Members will have seen its stand just off the Committee Corridor recently. Its big campaign is to try to make kerb parking illegal, as it is and has been in London since 1974. I know the roads Minister is looking at this issue, but perhaps a debate in Government time might persuade the Minister that it is about time those powers were extended outside London.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that there was a fantastic exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall. He is absolutely right that the big problem of pavement parking causes real challenges for people with visual impairments. I certainly encourage him, if he did not already raise this at Transport questions today, to raise it directly with Ministers, perhaps through an Adjournment debate.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On 5 June, The Yorkshire Post and other great northern newspapers wrote to the Prime Minister about their “One North” campaign in relation to the rail timetable shambles and their request for Transport for the North to get additional powers over transport in the north. It is now a month on and they have not had a response from the Prime Minister, so I wondered if the Leader could do her best to get a response to those newspapers.

Andrea Leadsom: If the hon. Lady wants to write to me, I can find out what has happened to the response she is looking for. She will be aware, though, that it was this Government who created the great north rail project, which intends to provide investment of well over £1 billion by 2020 to provide space for more than 40,000 more passengers. It is designed to provide big improvements for rail passengers in the north.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Fly-tipping is no longer a minor nuisance in Beckenham, and it is reaching almost endemic proportions in some places. The cost of dealing with even just one instance of it can run into thousands of pounds, not including checking it for hazardous waste and then trying to get evidence for prosecutions. Can we have a debate on the current level of financial support offered by the Treasury to local authorities to address the scourge of fly-tipping?

Andrea Leadsom: There is no doubt that the problem of fly-tipping has increased. My hon. Friend will be aware that as a Government, we are intending to reduce fly-tipping through better prevention, detection and risk-based enforcement. The National Fly-tipping Prevention Group promotes good practice and we are cracking down on offenders by strengthening the Sentencing Council’s guideline for environmental offences. We are also giving stronger powers for suspected fly-tippers’ vehicles to be seized and destroyed. There is no doubt that there is more to do but it is a priority for the Government, and he might like to seek an Adjournment debate to discuss it further.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): On this, the 70th anniversary of the NHS, colleagues might be surprised to hear of the £3.5 billion cost that alcohol causes to the NHS every year. That is enough to pay for the salaries...
of some 58,000 hospital doctors or more than 117,000 hospital nurses. With this in mind, will the Leader of the House find time for a debate in Government time, as this is important to every party in the House, on the harms and the cost of alcohol not only to health, but to our whole nation, as well as on the solutions we can use to address this problem?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important matter. The Government fully recognise the devastating impact that alcohol misuse can have on individuals and their families, as well as the costs to our health service, which in Northern Ireland, are up to £900 million each year. We are developing a new cross-Government strategy for alcohol, which, among a number of measures, will invest £6 million over three years to support vulnerable children living with alcohol-dependent parents. However, he is absolutely right: as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS, we have to consider the big challenges that it continues to face, such as tackling the damage of alcoholism.

**Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con):** Can we have an urgent debate on providing relief to communities whose lives and homes are being ruined by inappropriately routed traffic? The residents of Hockliffe have put up with days of really unacceptable disturbance. They want the A5 going through the village detrunked and a heavy goods vehicle ban, and this is entirely achievable as an acceptable alternative route exists.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear about my hon. Friend’s problems with his A5. I have similar problems with an A5 in my constituency, and I am sure that all hon. Members suffer considerable problems with particular roads. The Government are investing £15 billion in the strategic road network between 2015 and 2021 to improve its performance for users and those who are affected by it, such as, as he points out, the residents of Hockliffe. If he was not able to raise this in Transport questions earlier, I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, or if he wants to write to me, I can take up his particular question with the Department for Transport.

**Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab):** Many of my constituents worked at the Hoover factory in Merthyr Tydfil until it closed, except for distribution, in 2009, and they paid into what was a highly regarded pension fund. Despite the fund showing huge surpluses in past years, which paid into Her Majesty’s Treasury and the company, the pension pot is now in deficit and is being transferred to the Pension Protection Fund. Many of those who contributed the most risk having a 10% cut to their pension. With other companies taking this option, can we have a debate to consider the fairness of companies transferring their liabilities and pensioners losing out?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. Clearly, we have seen examples right across the country of companies that have effectively removed assets from their pension funds—it is completely unacceptable. The Under-Secretary of State for Wales, my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew), would be happy to meet him to discuss this particular issue, or indeed, he could seek an Adjournment debate to discuss it directly with Ministers.

**Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con):** New rolling stock—refurbished class 170s—are starting to appear on the Harrogate and Knaresborough line. I have had much positive feedback from constituents on this, and they can see the end in sight for Pacers. These trains are a significant upgrade. On top of that, we will see the first newly built stock arriving into the franchise from the manufacturer this month, so can we have a statement from the transport team on the progress that is being made on bringing new rolling stock into the railways of Yorkshire?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am really pleased to hear that my hon. Friend’s constituents have seen the improved quality that the class 170 trains are beginning to provide for passengers. Production of the new trains is well under way, with 14 trains already built. As he knows, this is part of a major programme, and both Northern and TransPennine will have bigger train fleets, all of which will be either brand new or fully refurbished. And, as he points out, this will mean the end of the unpopular Pacers trains.

**Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** Loraine Farren from the Red Box Project and Sarah Watkinson from Mirfield Winter Warmers are doing tremendous work in my constituency collecting and distributing menstrual products for girls in schools and young women who cannot afford to buy them for themselves. I am pleased to say that my office will be a collection point for anyone who wishes to drop off such products, and I hope that other MPs will be able to do the same at their constituency offices. May we have a further debate on period poverty?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises a really important issue, and I am pleased to tell the House that I was at a Youth Democracy Week event only this week where a young man raised exactly the same point. He asked why, when young men are being offered free condoms, young women cannot be offered free sanitary protection. I told him I completely agreed with him, and said that this would be exactly the sort of campaign that young people such as himself could use to raise the profile of this issue. The hon. Lady is also absolutely right to raise this, and I would be delighted to see her seek an Adjournment debate or indeed a Backbench Business debate so that this subject can be discussed more fully.

**John Howell (Henley) (Con):** May we please have a debate on what is being done to support our high streets? They represent an important part of our towns, and it would be useful to have a debate on this matter.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend might have seen the Grimsey report, which promotes the idea of local leadership on the high street. He is right to say that high streets are vital to thriving communities, and as people change the way in which they shop, it is important that we do more at local level to ensure that we keep the heart of our communities going.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am keen to accommodate remaining colleagues, but there should be a contract between us. Under the terms of the contract, colleagues should
undertake to ask a question that does not exceed a sentence. If they do that, I will be able to get everybody in.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): What a test, Mr Speaker! May we have a statement on the inadequacy of personal independence payment assessments for people with acquired brain injury? My constituent has contacted me to say that his nerves are shattered and that he is now on anti-depressants because, although his neurology report has clearly stated that he will never work again due to the severity and impact of his brain injury, he has been assessed as ineligible for this benefit.

Andrea Leadsom: I am truly sorry to hear about the hon. Lady's constituent's case. I encourage her to take it up directly with Ministers, or if she wants to write to me, I will do that for her.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): Hot, dry weather is normally something to be celebrated, but it has led to, and sustained, a huge fire on Winter Hill overlooking my constituency. I pay tribute to the contribution of the fire brigade in controlling the fire, but may we have a debate on the contribution of the voluntary sector, and especially the Bolton mountain rescue team, in dealing with this crisis?

Andrea Leadsom: I think all hon. Members will want to join my hon. Friend in praising the efforts of the firefighters and the military who are really working hard to try to get these fires under control. I am sure he will want to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate on this, so that there can be further discussion of the problems and the potential criminality that is causing the fires in the first place.

Judith Cummins (Bradford South) (Lab): A recent report found that 40% of the Government's top 100 suppliers failed to meet the basic legal requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. May we have a debate on modern slavery in supply chains, and on what progress the Government are making on ending extreme labour exploitation here and overseas?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to raise the issue of modern slavery. I am sure she will recognise that this Government have done a huge amount to try to tackle this scourge with the first ever Modern Slavery Act. She is right to raise the problem of continued slavery within the supply chain. We have Home Office questions on Monday 16 July, and she might want to seek a further update on progress at those oral questions.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): Our all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking reports next week on dispute resolution, so that businesses that have been mistreated by their banks will be able to find justice for the first time. Bearing in mind that the kick-off for our event is at 7 o'clock next Wednesday, would my right hon. Friend be willing to offer some Government time to enable these matters to be properly debated?

Andrea Leadsom: I first pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his assiduous efforts to ensure better banking that is fair to consumers and businesses—he has really fought hard on this topic—and I would certainly support the idea of a debate in this place. He might want to seek a Back-Bench debate, given that the issue is of great interest right across the House and that many Members have constituency cases of their own.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): May we have a debate in Government time about how long it takes Ministers to respond to letters? I wrote to the Home Office about my Easterhouse constituent, Mr Kasharfeh, eight months ago, and I have only just had a holding reply. Does the Leader of the House think that is really good enough?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sorry to hear about that delay. I am sure there is a reason for it. As he will know, there are standard turnaround times for Departments to respond to correspondence, but occasionally letters do go astray. We have Home Office questions on 16 July, but if he wants to write to me, I can chase it up for him.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Could the Leader of the House look at the policy of flying the England flag on match days? It is obviously fantastic news that the England men's football team have been so successful, but on Sunday the England women's cricket team defeated New Zealand in the final of the three nations series—Australia, New Zealand and England—and they go into the world cup this winter as the hot favourites. Please can we fly the flag for women and men equally?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend should be reassured to know that the Prime Minister made clear her determination to fly the England flag for England's women as much as England's men, and indeed for all nations of the United Kingdom. We support our sporting teams. It is a great pleasure that we all come together to share the enjoyment of our national sporting teams.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): After suffering domestic abuse and with the support of the police, my constituent was able to leave the home she shared with her partner, but the bank refused to allow her to take her name off the mortgage without his permission. Of course, he would not give permission and he blocked the sale of the house. After five years of her not paying the mortgage, the bank repossessed and sold below the market rate, leaving her with a £35,000 debt. Can we have a statement outlining what help can be given to my constituent and what can be done to make banks fulfil their moral duty as well as their legal duty?

Andrea Leadsom: I have a vague recollection that the hon. Gentleman has raised exactly this point before with the details of the case, I can forward them to the Department for a substantive reply.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): As the Leader of the House will know, small and medium-sized
businesses are the lifeblood of my local economy. What opportunities will there be in the near future to discuss the opportunities they will have in a post-Brexit Britain?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I hope my hon. Friend will recognise that we have had one or two debates on the UK’s prospects as we seek to leave the EU; there will be many more opportunities, but I just remind all hon. Members that we had 37 days of debate on the withdrawal Bill and five Westminster Hall debates in the last month on Brexit and the opportunities arising from it. He is absolutely right, though, that we need to consider the opportunities and not just the negotiations. There are significant chances, particularly given that many UK companies do not do business with the EU but still have to abide by regulations that for many small and medium-sized enterprises can really hamper progress. I am very optimistic about their future, and I am sure he will find plenty of chances in the coming weeks to put forward his views on the opportunities that will arise.

**Jo Stevens** (Cardiff Central) (Lab): Refugee families with young children settled in schools in Cardiff Central are being moved hundreds of miles around the country with just a few days’ notice because of a shortage of outsourced Home Office accommodation, which undoes all the good work that teachers and teaching assistants do to help these most vulnerable of children. Please can we have a statement from the Home Secretary about the expensive, shoddy and dysfunctional Home Office accommodation contracts?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady will be aware that this country has been incredibly generous and very careful in the way that it treats refugees who come to this country to seek asylum and to escape from appalling experiences overseas. However, she may wish to raise her specific concerns during Home Office questions, which will take place on 16 July.

**Justin Madders** (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): On Tuesday a member of staff at the Countess of Chester hospital was arrested following the investigation of a number of unexplained deaths in the neonatal unit. Anyone who has attended baby loss debates in the House will know that it is impossible to overestimate how traumatic the loss of a newborn is, which is why I was so disgusted to hear of the doorstepping of my constituents by members of the press following the news. May we please have a debate on how we can stop this disgusting, immoral practice?

**Andrea Leadsom:** We have all been horrified to hear about the problem of unexplained deaths in that hospital, and I entirely share the hon. Gentleman’s disgust at the doorstepping of people who have suffered the appalling loss of a baby. It is utterly unacceptable. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to take this up directly with Ministers, or perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate in order to discuss the issue of intrusion in such very sensitive cases.

**Chris Law** (Dundee West) (SNP): After 17 months of dithering, delays and doubts, the UK Government have still not made a full commitment to the Tay cities deal. They have not said how much they will provide and when they will provide it. The people of Dundee have a right to know, and they need to know now. May we have an urgent statement, most properly from the Treasury but perhaps from the Secretary of State for Scotland, about the progress of the deal and when it will finally be delivered?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, Scotland questions will take place next Wednesday, and I am sure that Ministers will be able to give him the answer then. However, I am also sure he will be delighted that four city region deals have already been arranged in Glasgow, Inverness and the Highlands, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh and south-east Scotland. So progress is being made, and the Government have shown their commitment to providing greater devolution so that local communities can make their own progress in the way that is most appropriate for them.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle** (Brighton, Kemptown) (Lab/Co-op): This week *The Guardian* revealed that the Government are spending some of the £1.3 billion aid budget of the conflict, stability and security fund on promoting austerity with Saatchi and Saatchi in Tunisia. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact has said that the fund is badly managed, and the International Development Committee has asked for an immediate review of it. Will the Secretary of State for International Development come to the House and make a statement about how that review will take place?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am afraid I am not aware of the report that the hon. Gentleman has cited. I suggest he take it up either by means of a written question or directly with International Development Ministers, so that he can be given an answer that is to his satisfaction.

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. Points of order come after statements.
Construction Sector Deal

12.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): I note with respect, Mr Speaker, that you are wearing the same badge as I am, and I therefore hope you will join me in wishing the NHS a very happy birthday. That, of course, is also relevant to the construction sector deal, because the NHS is responsible for a large amount of construction.

With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement in response to the Government’s publication of the sector deal for construction. Sector deals, in which industries are invited to come forward with plans for their future, embody the ethos of our collaborative approach. They show how industry and the Government, working in partnership, can boost the productivity and earning power of specific sectors. We have already struck ambitious deals with the artificial intelligence, life sciences, automotive and creative industries sectors, and the nuclear sector deal was announced last week.

We look forward to building on that in the months ahead.

In keeping with the ethos to which I have referred, today’s deal represents a joint vision agreed by the Government and the construction sector which aims to transform the sector’s productivity through innovative technologies and a more highly skilled workforce.

Construction underpins our economy and society. Few sectors have such an impact on communities across the UK, or have the same potential to provide large numbers of high-skilled, well-paid jobs. The construction sector, encompassing contracting, product manufacturing and professional services, had a turnover of about £370 billion in 2016, and employs 3.1 million people.

Given its size and importance, the sector has a vital role to play in achieving the vision set out in our industrial strategy: strengthening the foundations of our economy, achieving the grand challenges of putting the UK at the forefront of the artificial intelligence and data revolution, maximising the advantages from the global shift to clean growth, becoming a world leader in the future of mobility, and meeting the needs of an ageing society.

We are in the early days of what is one of the greatest construction programmes in our history, from delivering more affordable and safer homes in places where people want to live, to major infrastructure projects such as Crossrail and the third runway at Heathrow. This infrastructure pipeline represents more than £600 billion over the next decade, including at least £44 billion for housing. The pace of that change, and its size, demands a construction sector that is the best in the world, and today’s deal sets out to make that a reality.

First, the sector and the Government are making a joint £420 million investment to develop and commercialise digital design and offsite manufacturing technologies. We aim to reduce the cost of new buildings by a third, and to halve the time taken to deliver them. That will ensure that we get value for money from the Government’s national infrastructure and construction pipeline. The current projections are for about £600 billion of public and private investment in infrastructure over the next 10 years, as well as a doubling of expenditure on economic infrastructure in the decade to 2022-23. The investment will also support the Government’s aspiration to deliver 1.5 million new homes by 2022.

Secondly, we will ensure that the construction sector is able to attract, train and retain the workforce that it needs both now and in the future, as it meets the demographic challenge of a workforce in which nearly a third of workers are over 50. That includes working with the Construction Industry Training Board to ensure that there is a strategic focus on future skills needs, and to increase significantly the number of approved apprenticeship standards. The sector will also aspire to increase the number of apprenticeships to 25,000 a year by 2020, and will work with professional institutions and the higher and further education sectors to ensure that all those training for or working in the industry are able to develop and increase their skills.

Finally, to ensure that the construction sector is home to more sustainable, profitable businesses, the standard business model needs to change to one that is based on strong integrated supply chains and higher levels of collaboration. Key to that is a boost in the sector’s exporting capability, driven by our new investments in digital and manufacturing technologies to make the most of a market that is estimated to be worth £49 trillion between now and 2030. We will also ensure that construction firms have better access to the capital that the industry needs to invest and grow. That will include taking account of existing funding streams and the conclusions of the patient capital review, which aims to increase the availability of long-term finance to innovative firms.

History shows that the business community is best placed to identify what firms really need, and when the Government will be there to support them. Sector deals rely on committed and visionary leadership. I therefore thank Andrew Wolstenholme, the sector deal champion, and the whole Construction Leadership Council, without whom this ambitious deal would not have been possible.

After the statement I shall be visiting Battersea power station, where I will meet the leading members of the sector who have been so influential in bringing the deal to fruition.

The sector deal will drive economic growth, create well-paid, highly-skilled jobs in every part of the UK, and improve lives across the country. It represents a shared commitment to achieve those goals by establishing a strategic partnership between the Government and the sector, which we will seek to strengthen in the years ahead.

12.18 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I thank the Minister for early sight of the statement. It is welcome that there is a sector deal for construction, although the promised “a few weeks” from last November have become nine months.

Like last week’s nuclear deal statement, this appears to be a series of renouncements of previous ministerial policies. The announcement about reducing emissions, although welcome, would be more credible if it were not so starkly at odds with other Government policies, such as last week’s cancellation of the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. The steel, retail and rail industries are still awaiting responses to the proposals that they made last September. Perhaps the Minister will tell us when other sector deals will be agreed.
The collapse of Carillion of course caused at least some of the delay in today’s announcement, but that in turn was caused by the Government’s own lack of oversight, so what assurances will the Minister give to the sector that there will be no more Carillions, and that suppliers and workers can have confidence that Government will support them on Government-funded contracts? And what in this deal will address the concerns around late payment and retentions that the Carillion fiasco highlighted, with 30,000 suppliers owed £2 billion? What was changed during the review of this sector deal from what was announced last year? There appears to be nothing to tackle the problems endemic in public sector construction procurement.

The commitments in this sector deal on productivity and the speed of building are welcome, but they need to be matched by a significant increase in Government investment in infrastructure and house building projects. That is how we can properly support the construction industry. The TUC has shown that the £31 billion through the national productivity fund increases public investment to 2.9% of GDP, whereas the average spent on investment by leading industrial nations in the OECD is higher, at 3.5%. Labour is committed to a national transformation fund of £250 billion of capital investment over 10 years. Comparing those figures, we have to question whether the Government’s commitment to investment is meaningful. Similarly, the rhetoric about skills and technical education is welcome, but can the Minister give the sector an assurance that those skills will be developed to enable the radical transformation of construction that this country desperately needs?

There are great concerns about the exploitation of construction workers, often by the use of bogus self-employment, and the abuses of human rights and risks to the safety of too many workers through the behaviour of some unscrupulous employers. What are the Government’s plans to protect workers through this deal?

The deal appears to ignore the important role played by smaller firms. What is in the deal for small builders, for whom accessing investment in new technology is likely to be a challenge?

This week’s Jaguar Land Rover announcement that it might move production out of the UK and re-evaluate its planned £80 billion of investment is deeply worrying, not least for the 40,000 workers directly employed. JLR’s is just the latest in a string of warnings from manufacturers vital to the success of British industry, and the same warnings apply in construction and throughout the construction supply chain. The Government’s mishandling of Brexit makes a mockery of their industrial strategy; they must listen to businesses and place workers and our economy ahead of ideology.

Richard Harrington: I thank the shadow spokesman for taking us on a wider canter through industrial strategy and mentioning Brexit. I will try to answer his questions, but I will also do my best to stick to the sector deal, Mr Speaker, as I know you would like to make progress.

I make no excuses about the time this has taken because we wanted to get it right. We are always pressed on occasions like this to use words and phrases like “soon”, “imminently” and “at the end of the year”.

Bill Esterson: A few weeks?

Richard Harrington: Well, this is a few weeks: we are talking about nine months, and nine times four is about 36 weeks, which is a few weeks compared with 5,000 weeks. But the hon. Gentleman makes a serious point, and we did want to get this right.

Sector deals are no longer just Government edicts. They are true partnerships with not just the usual suspects but lots of companies in industry, and we have done our best to get this right and make it as comprehensive as possible. I am sorry that the delay has put the hon. Gentleman out, but I believe we have got it right, and I welcome the more positive comments he made, among quite a lot of negative ones.

I would make the same point about the other sector deals the hon. Gentleman mentioned, such as that for rail. We are working on them: there is no go-slow: Ministers are not off playing golf. These are very important to me; this is a big chunk of my portfolio and I do hope that at least privately the hon. Gentleman will accept that I do my best with diligence to try to get to the bottom of these things. But they are very comprehensive: the documents may contain a few graphics and things in colour, but they are serious documents, and, more importantly, the deals behind them are very serious.

The hon. Gentleman rightly raises Carillion as that is an important matter. There are a lot of things to be learned for the future from what happened. The Government have worked very well with banks and other institutions. We have taken on board the wider lessons to do with the Insolvency Service and so forth, we have consulted a lot of people on Carillion, and we are on the way to showing companies like Carillion that directors cannot behave irresponsibly, because the consequences are very significant. They affect not only shareholders and banks; they can affect millions of people and small and large businesses alike.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government’s attitude to research and development expenditure. I am proud of our aspiration of 2.9% of GDP for research and development. In dealing now with these bids for the industrial strategy challenge fund and so forth, we are seeing a very significant increase in Government expenditure on research and development. It is a very large part of BEIS’s budget.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Labour party’s view that everything should happen now or more quickly: well, it did not do so in all the years Labour was in power. I try not to make party political points if I can possibly avoid it, but I think history will show that our record in increasing research and development spending is very good, and in practice sector deals are the conduit through which it is used. Gone are the days when Government Departments and institutions like the National Economic Development Council, which I remember visiting as an A-level economics student at school, did this; gone are the days when civil servants and Ministers decided where this money was invested. There is now a thoughtful process, independently held, in our case through Sir Mark Walport, and I am very hopeful that in the future more money will be spent through this process.

The hon. Gentleman asked a reasonable question about how significant a part of the agenda skills were. For construction, skills are without doubt critical. Most people in construction currently talk about skills shortages and the increased number of apprentices that is aspired
to in this sector deal certainly cannot be taken lightly. I have seen the way young people are being trained up through apprenticeships, and there is also the retraining of older people, the T-levels and all the other related educational matters that I do not have time to go into today. They will all make a significant difference to skills.

It is true, too, that different skills will be needed in the future, as I saw from the type of skills being used during a recent visit I made to Skanska, in Rickmansworth near my constituency. Computers are now used not just to make the design we are so used to in building but in the detailed technicalities for each part of the project. I was shown an example in Paddington station where every material for every panel will be passed to owners of the future, because part of the sector deal is about the whole life of buildings, not just the original construction which was traditionally the most important aspect.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman mentioned workers’ conditions, and who is and who is not an employee and so forth. He will know about the Taylor review and that the Government are accepting almost every recommendation Taylor makes. That will make a significant difference to people’s lives.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. We are immensely grateful to the Minister, from whom we had a Cook’s tour of his personal experiences as a constituency representative. We are deeply indebted to the Minister, although I was wondering at one point whether his response to the shadow Minister would be longer than his original statement, but there we go. I call Mr Kevin Hollinrake, whose beaming countenance is most suitable.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I welcome the statement. It mentions the patient capital review, which aims to increase the availability of long-term finance for innovative firms, so will the Minister confirm that that will be targeted at small and medium-sized construction companies?

Richard Harrington: I will try not to mention a constituency example here, Mr Speaker.

I thank my hon. Friend for that question. Capital is important. It is often spoken about in terms of large fundraising exercises, such as bond issues and initial public offerings, but it is important that small firm financing is also taken into account. The banks are proud of the fact that they are significantly increasing their small business lending, and we intend to monitor that carefully.

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I thank the Minister for advance sight of the statement. I noted with interest that the statement refers to “a joint £420 million investment from the sector and government” and “£600 billion of public and private investment in infrastructure over the next 10 years”.

I was wondering about the split between public and private money. With Carillion in mind, where will the risk lie in such joint ventures? It would be remiss of me not to ask how much of the new money will be given to the Scottish Government to spend, because they have a good track record on major infrastructure builds.

The statement also says that 1.5 million new homes will be built. Will the Minister guarantee that, within the specifications for the new builds, every effort will be made to ensure that buildings are environmentally-friendly to build and energy-efficient to run? There are remarkable examples from around the globe that can be taken on board and copied. The efficiency and longevity of new buildings is crucial.

I welcome the intention to create more apprenticeships, which have been much neglected since the 1980s—hence why a third of the workforce are over 50. The Scottish Government have been leading the way in creating meaningful apprentice schemes, and I am really pleased that this place has decided to follow.

Finally, given that export capability has rightly been identified as so important, will the Minister fight for tariff-free access to European markets at tomorrow’s Cabinet showdown on Brexit?

Richard Harrington: I will do best to answer without the global canter that you so politely reprimanded me for using, Mr Speaker. There will be no more cantering, or indeed galloping for that matter. I shall do my best to trot, if that is possible—I promise the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) that I am not trying to cut my answer down.

The SNP spokesman’s first question was about the mixture of public and private capital, but that depends on the projects that are available. We know what money is in the current spending plans, but we also know about projects that are coming through, such as Heathrow. I cannot give him an exact split, but we are certain that the total amount that was mentioned will come to fruition, and I am conscious of the fact that Scotland must get its share. That point was well put and well noted. I am certain that Scottish Conservative Members—[Interruption.] They are in Scotland. I am sure that all Scottish Members will take me and other Ministers to task if Scotland does not get its fair share.

Several hon. Members rose—

Richard Harrington: Scotland will get its fair share—[Interruption.] Ah, I thank the shadow Minister for pointing out what was happening behind me, because we do not yet have eyes in the backs of our heads, although I am sure that a Labour Government would give them out free to everybody.

The hon. Member for Inverclyde made a good point about fire safety and energy-efficiency specifications for new homes. I have visited the Building Research Establishment in my constituency—I thought you might be interested to know that, Mr Speaker—where state-of-the-art work is going on. If the hon. Gentleman was referring to the terrible tragedy at Grenfell, I am sure that lessons about construction types will be learnt.

Apprenticeships are an important part of the sector deal, and they mean a lot. Apprenticeships do not have to be for school leavers, which has been the tradition. There will be a lot of retraining, and the Government recognise that in their policies, but the purely physical tasks that made up the majority of construction jobs in
the past are slowly being replaced with jobs that require a significant amount of training and a lot less physical effort.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asks me to ensure that the Prime Minister makes it certain at tomorrow’s Chequers awayday that UK companies will be able to export their products to the European Union. I can happily assure him that that is very much the case.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I welcome what the Minister says about the 25,000 apprenticeships, but one of the grand challenges facing the Government is helping to meet the needs of an ageing population. How does the deal help to meet that need?

Richard Harrington: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. The answer is that the type of apprenticeships will be commensurate with the new types of skills within building. As I explained in answer to the hon. Member for Inverclyde, that will involve retraining at different ages, as well as jobs that involve skills other than physical skills, which were complex but were done just by young men in the past. In fact, I am pleased to say that many more women are now involved in construction apprenticeships, and we will start to see people of my age doing apprenticeships—quite a few people in my constituency probably hope that that will be me in a few years’ time.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on his pre-reshuffle tour d’horizon of the industry and on a statement that is welcome in both its intentions and its aspirations. However, without any detailed measures, it is frankly just more waffle. For example, the Minister rightly drew attention to the forthcoming infrastructure programme, where local and national Government have huge clout as the client, so will the Government be using that influence to put into their contracts requirements for the prompt payment of subcontractors? In addition, will they demand proper ratios of apprentices on sites, by which I mean real craft apprenticeships to fill the huge skill gaps and to provide career opportunities for our youngsters?

Richard Harrington: I shall send the right hon. Gentleman a copy of the construction sector deal so that he knows that it is not just meaningless waffle. [Interruption] I am delighted he has one and I will do my best to respond to the numerous points that he made. He asked whether the Government would use their power over those things that they fund to ensure that small businesses are used—that is correct. The Government are keen on using their power in that way, such as by mandating the use of level 2 building information modelling for all construction projects to encourage the adoption of digital technologies. The Government will also be at the forefront of the manufacturing of buildings off-site for suitable projects, such as schools and NHS buildings.

The right hon. Gentleman was concerned that the Government should not use such powers to affect the number of apprenticeships on site. That is very much our policy, and it will be part of the tender documents to come. However, I hope that that will not be necessary, because the industry is desperate for apprentices and we will see a lot of the new types of apprenticeships.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): In Chelmsford last week, local councillors approved a local plan that includes 8,800 homes on new sites, and 11,700 homes have already been approved. We are building schools, GP surgeries, community centres and the amazing new medical school, so masses of construction is ongoing. The sector deal is welcome, but Chelmsford College has two issues. One is finding tutors with the experience to teach apprenticeships; the other is getting apprentices placed with smaller businesses such as electricians. Can you focus on addressing those two pinch points?

Richard Harrington: Mr Speaker, I thought you were going to reprimand my hon. Friend for referring to me as “you”; thank you for forgiving her.

I accept that finding more tutors is a problem, and the Construction Industry Training Board is cognisant of that. The Government are making sure everything is done with the training board and there will be new apprenticeship standards. The number of starts will increase to about 25,000, which is a 15% increase. I regularly meet the training board, and I will happily ensure that it is aware of the specific points raised about Chelmsford.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): The Minister will be aware that 30% of people who work in the construction sector in London are EU nationals and that they are younger than their UK equivalents. Meanwhile, the number of apprenticeships has plummeted, particularly for under-25s. What guarantee can he give that we will have sufficient skilled people available, particularly given that the construction sector will be in competition with sectors such as agriculture for those employees? I expect, of course, a very comprehensive reply from the Minister.

Richard Harrington: I will do my best—under your supervision, Mr Speaker—to make sure that my reply is comprehensive.

Skilled labour from the European Union is critical to the construction industry, which already competes with all the other industries. Mr Speaker, you will be delighted to hear that last week I visited a wonderful business: Gateville in Watford, which was started by a Romanian gentleman, Bogdan Catargiu. The company is using his skills, and those of his colleagues from this country and the European Union, to build social housing in the UK. Following Brexit, I cannot envisage a situation in which we will not allow people with the necessary skills, such as those in the construction industry, to come to this country to work, and to provide a lot of prosperity to this country—and, I hope, to themselves—as they have over the past few decades.

Mr Speaker: It is always a great pleasure to listen to the mellifluous tones of the Minister, who I know from personal experience to be an extremely agreeable fellow, but I gently point out to the House that the statement has now run for half an hour and we have heard from only five Back Benchers. Perhaps there is scope for an improvement in productivity, to be brilliantly exemplified, I feel sure, by Mr Eddie Hughes.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I am approaching my 50th birthday in October and I am concerned by the undertones suggesting that that is in any way old.
[Eddie Hughes]

I am a member of the Chartered Institute of Building and a fan of innovative technology such as blockchain. What can these new technologies do to improve productivity in the construction sector deal?

Mr Speaker: We often hear from the hon. Gentleman about this blockchain business. I feel I ought to educate myself on the matter.

Richard Harrington: Mr Speaker, I feel you are asking me to produce a sector deal for brevity of statements by junior Ministers—I will start work immediately.

The type of skills we need are changing, as we see more modular building and so on. I am sure that the skills that my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) and I are aware of now will be very different from the skills needed by generations to come. I expect that he and I will use some skills in our 80s that we did not use 30 years ago. The important part of the sector deal is to make sure that apprenticeships are appropriate for a sector in which one third of the construction workforce are now over 50. Under this fantastic sector deal, the training board and the standards will evolve as the building industry evolves.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I urge the Minister to get a gallop on and announce the sector deal for renewables, which is an important industry for us in East Yorkshire. We are keen to see that sector deal announced. When will he provide details on the local sector deals, which were first announced at the end of last year?

Richard Harrington: We have another horse analogy. I said that I would trot, and I have been accused of cantering, but now I will try to gallop. I note the hon. Lady’s point about the local sector deals, and her area is one of our higher priorities. I cannot answer her question about renewables because that is not one of my sectors, but perhaps I can drop her a line or meet her to discuss it.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I strongly welcome the construction sector deal. With productivity in the construction sector on average 21% lower than in the rest of the economy, it is vital that we tackle that to increase our housing stock. Does the Minister agree that investing in digital and off-site manufacturing technologies will also boost our STEM sector? That is vital for constituencies such as mine, which is a hub of engineering, design and technology.

Richard Harrington: The sector deal shows that those types of skills will be adapted to building. Digital technology, artificial intelligence and precisely the STEM skills that my hon. Friend mentions are an important part of the sector deal and of the future construction industry.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What discussions have there been with the devolved Assemblies on match funding for energy-efficient new builds? What is being done to encourage every region to make full use of this initiative?

Richard Harrington: The devolved authorities are very much part of all our thinking. We will continue to work closely with them. I would be happy to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss Northern Ireland in this context. I congratulate him on his question—and on the questions he has asked at every single statement I have given and every single urgent question I have answered in Parliament.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Is it not the case that if there were further incentives for construction companies and developers to build out, they would be forced, as it were, to recruit and train more people, because they would need them, rather than moving people from one site to another? Is it possible for the Government to consider compulsory purchase powers for local authorities if developers do not build after a couple of years or, indeed, to consider charging council tax 12 months after a planning application is approved, rather than when the build-out occurs?

Richard Harrington: The review by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is considering those points, and I am sure that we will be delighted to report the review’s progress to the House.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): As a chartered civil engineer, I welcome the principle of the construction sector deal. On protecting the supply chain, the Government must deal with two key issues: the elimination of cash retentions; and, as the Minister knows from his previous role, the effect that multi-employer pensions are having on subcontractors, particularly plumbers. Will the Minister review the Multi-employer Pension Schemes Bill—my private Member’s Bill—and have a word with the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman), to ask him to take on board the measures in my Bill?

Richard Harrington: We are currently considering the entire policy on retentions, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows. We are reviewing the responses to our consultation and considering the options for future policy.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): When we consider construction, we often think about only what we see above ground. Saint-Gobain and Stanton Bonna in my constituency make pressed concrete and cast pipework. Can the Minister reassure the House that his statement on the construction sector deal will benefit all aspects of construction, whether invisible or visible?

Richard Harrington: Absolutely; I can reassure my hon. Friend on that point.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What is there in the construction sector deal to encourage small builders in Kettering?

Richard Harrington: My hon. Friend, as always, speaks up for Kettering, and he does so well. Kettering is typical of many places in the country where small businesses are the core of the construction industry. The sector deal is not silent about that. [Interruption.] The shadow Minister is chuntering that he made that point—he did, and he is absolutely right.
Small businesses are the core of the construction industry. On every visit I have made to the tier 1 large contractors, they have been very conscious that small businesses are part of the industry. We have to make sure that those small businesses get their share of the expenditure on apprenticeships, as they are getting, and make it easier for them to get apprentices, which we are doing. The training board and the industry bodies we work with are conscious of that.

Amesbury Incident

12.49 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement regarding the events that have been unfolding in Amesbury and Salisbury. This morning, I chaired a meeting of the Government’s emergency committee, Cobra, covering the ongoing investigation in Amesbury. I have been separately briefed by the security services and by counter-terrorism police.

As many Members will now know, a 45-year-old man and a 44-year-old woman were found to be unwell at a property at Muggleton Road in Amesbury on Saturday—both are British citizens. Paramedics attended the scene and admitted the pair to the accident and emergency department at Salisbury District Hospital, where they were treated for exposure to an unknown substance. Further testing by expert scientists in chemical warfare at the Porton Down laboratory confirmed this to be the nerve agent of the type known as Novichok. This has been identified as the same nerve agent that contaminated both Yulia and Sergei Skripal.

The pair are currently in a critical condition, and I am sure the whole House will want to join me in wishing them a full and swift recovery. I would also like to express my sincere thanks to the emergency services and staff at the Salisbury District Hospital for their tireless professionalism and for the dedicated care they are providing. I understand that there will be some concerns about what this incident means for public safety. In particular, I recognise that some local Wiltshire residents will be feeling very anxious. Let me reassure everyone that public safety is of paramount importance. Public Health England’s latest assessment is that based on the number of casualties affected, there is no significant risk to the wider public. Its advice is informed by scientists and the police as the facts evolve. Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer, has confirmed that the risk to the public remains low, and has asked that the public follow the advice of Public Health England and the police. She has also advised that people who have visited the areas that have been recently cordoned off should wash their clothes and wipe down any items they may have been carrying at the time. She has also urged people not to pick up any unknown or already dangerous objects such as needles and syringes. That is not new advice and it follows on from what was said in March. We have a well-established response to these types of incidents and clear processes to follow.

I also want to add that all the sites that have been decontaminated following the attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal are safe. All sites that have been reopened have undergone rigorous testing, and any items that may have harboured residual amounts of the agent were safely removed for disposal. We have taken a very robust approach to decontamination, and there is no evidence that either the man or the woman in hospital visited any of the places that were visited by the Skripals. Our strong working assumption is that the couple came into contact with the nerve agent in a different location from the sites that have been part of the original clean-up operation. The police have also set up two dedicated phone numbers for anyone with concerns relating to this incident. Salisbury District Hospital
[Sajid Javid]

remains open as usual and is advising people to attend routine operations unless they are contacted and told otherwise.

We are taking this incident incredibly seriously and are working around the clock to discover precisely what has happened, where and why. Be assured that we have world-leading scientists, intelligence officers and police on this case. Local residents can expect to see an increased police presence in and around Amesbury and Salisbury. All six sites that were visited by the pair before they collapsed have been cordoned off and are being securely guarded as a precaution. An investigation has started to work out how these two individuals came into contact with the nerve agent. About 100 detectives from the counter-terrorism policing network are working to support this investigation, alongside colleagues from Wiltshire police.

Obviously, this incident will invoke memories of the reckless attempted murder of Sergei and Yulia Skripal earlier this year, given the similarities. I know that many Members will question whether this incident is linked to that one. That is clearly the main line of inquiry. However, we must not jump to conclusions and we must give the police the space and time to carry out their investigations—the police’s work will take time. But we are ready to respond as and when new evidence comes to light and the situation becomes clearer.

Following the events in Salisbury earlier this year, we rapidly worked with international partners at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to confirm our identification of the nerve agent used. Through a process of extensive, impartial testing and analysis, our findings were confirmed correct beyond doubt. The use of chemical weapons anywhere is barbaric and inhumane. The decision taken by the Russian Government to deploy them in Salisbury on 4 March was reckless and callous. There is no plausible alternative explanation to explain the events in March other than that the Russian state was responsible, and we acted accordingly. The British Government and the international community immediately and robustly condemned this inhuman action. In the light of this attack, the UK expelled 23 Russian diplomats from our shores, and we were joined by 28 of our closest international allies in this action, ranging from the United States to Ukraine, who expelled more than 150 of the Russian state’s diplomats.

We have already seen multiple explanations from state-sponsored Russian media regarding this latest incident. We can anticipate further disinformation from the Kremlin, as we saw following the Salisbury attack. As we did before, we will be consulting our international partners and allies following these latest developments. The eyes of the world are currently on Russia, not least because of the World cup. It is now time that the Russian state comes forward and explains exactly what has gone on. Let me be clear: we do not have a quarrel with the Russian people. Rather, it is the actions of the Russian Government that continue to undermine our security and that of the international community. We will stand up to actions that threaten our security and the security of our partners. It is completely unacceptable for our people to be either deliberate or accidental targets, or for our streets, parks or towns to be dumping grounds for poison. We will continue our investigations as a matter of urgency, and I will keep the House and the public updated on any significant developments. I commend this statement to the House.

12.57 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for making his statement to this House and for giving me prior sight of it. The whole House appreciates that he came here directly from a Cobra meeting. As he said, the first duty of any Government is to secure the safety and security of their people and all those resident in this country. No Government can allow the poisoning of their citizens or residents as they go about their daily lives, by state actors or others. As he has said, the use of chemical weapons is both barbaric and inhumane. Our thoughts and best wishes go out to Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley, and we wish them a speedy and complete recovery. I would also like to place on the record the admiration and support we on this side of the House have for the work of the emergency services, the security services and the vital public servants at Porton Down.

The Home Secretary will appreciate how alarmed the public, particularly the people of Wiltshire, must be at this second incident involving the nerve agent Novichok in four months. This incident has occurred long after local people had been assured that there had been a thorough clean-up of the area. We understood that numerous areas across Salisbury had been decontaminated, at great expense and with great thoroughness. It is still not clear whether this is a wholly separate incident or the fall-out from the original incident but with effects being felt months apart.

The Home Secretary will appreciate that if there are connections, other than the type of nerve agent involved, between this latest incident and the Skripal case, the House and the general public will obviously want to know as soon as possible. The House has not received an update on the Skripal case for some time; the Home Secretary may wish to take this opportunity to update the House and the general public about ongoing work on the Skripal case. The House and the public at large will want reassurance, but they will want it to be based on facts. I agree with the Home Secretary that we should not jump to conclusions. We need the facts on this serious matter, and no doubt Members from all parties will resist the temptation to engage in wild speculation or to offer their own guesswork as informed opinion.

Members from all parties, along with the general public, will eventually want to understand how this incident could have occurred. The public will also be concerned about other issues. Do the local police have the resources that they need? Will the Government be providing them and the local authority with additional emergency funding for the enormous drain on resources that this investigation and the securing of various sites will inevitably involve? As well as causing great public concern, this second incident will be a blow to business and retail in the area. Local businesses were just recovering from the Salisbury fallout; what support will they be given? Will the Secretary of State assure the public that this new clean-up and decontamination effort will be exemplary in its thoroughness?

There are some matters that the Secretary of State might usefully raise with his colleagues in the Department
of Health and Social Care. Do all relevant emergency workers and health professionals have sufficient information to recognise the symptoms of this type of poisoning? Do they have advice on how to respond to suspected cases? The public will have noted that although Dawn Sturgess and Charlie Rowley took ill on Saturday night and were taken to exactly the same hospital as the Skripals, it apparently took two days to refer the case to Porton Down.

As the Home Secretary said, the eyes of the world are on Russia. We will all have seen the very warm and enthusiastic response of the Russian people to people coming from all over the world for the World Cup. The Opposition supported the expulsion of the 23 Russian diplomats and the other related actions that Her Majesty’s Government took in the wake of the Salisbury incident, and we will support any action that the Government take that will keep our people safe. We cannot allow the streets of ordinary British towns and communities to become killing fields for state actors.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her support and her comments and join her in stating again that the whole House wishes the victims a very speedy recovery. I very much welcome her questions, which I shall try to respond to in turn.

The right hon. Lady asked, perfectly correctly, for reassurance that this incident is not connected in any way to the areas that were decontaminated after the original incident back in March. We are very comfortable that that is not the case—and that is not just the view of Ministers on their own; it is the view of experts, especially the decontamination experts. They are clear that the decontamination exercise was successful, as is Dame Sally Davies, the chief medical officer, and we are happy to say that those areas are all safe. We are also comfortable that, from what we know, in this particular incident neither individual contracted or came into contact with the nerve agent at any of the decontaminated areas. That is our belief.

The right hon. Lady asked whether there was any more information on the connection between this incident and the original incident. That is of course the main line of inquiry for the police, for obvious reasons, but as she alluded to—it is worth restating—none of us should rush to prejudge the outcome of the investigation. As more evidence and any information comes out, we will of course share that with Members and with the wider public.

The right hon. Lady rightfully raised the issue of resources, and I can reassure her on that. In fact, one of the main things that we discussed at the Cobra meeting earlier was ensuring that all the necessary resources are made available, as they were back in March. We wanted to make sure that that applied to everyone involved in dealing with this incident, but particularly local police, CT policing and the security services. I am comfortable that any resources required will be provided and any further requests will be met. That will be a priority for us.

The right hon. Lady mentioned the impact on the local area, and she was right to do so. People local to the area were heroic in their response to the original attack and have united, together as a community, and sent a clear message of support for each other. At the time of the original incident, there was a lot of support from the local council, Wiltshire Council, and from local political leaders, including my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), who contacted me at the moment he knew about the incident to ask about further support. We are looking at what more can be done. We will meet the leader of the local council, Baroness Jane Scott, and talk about precisely that, and we will also talk about, as the right hon. Lady mentioned, local businesses, many of which were just starting to recover. Whether they are high street shops or part of the local tourist trade, we want to make sure that their business is as unaffected as possible, so we are looking at what further support we can provide to them. The right hon. Lady was absolutely right to raise that point.

The right hon. Lady asked about local health expertise. The Department of Health and Social Care is of course making sure that if any extra resources are required, they will be provided to the health services. It is particularly important that, given that it is where the victims are, Salisbury District Hospital has all the support needed. My current understanding is that in respect of the two victims in this case, the health professionals in the hospital were able to use some of the experience that they gained from March’s incident in their approach, which meant that the right type of medical support was provided earlier than it perhaps would have been otherwise. There is considerable local expertise, but of course if more needs to be provided, it will be.

Lastly, the right hon. Lady asked me about an update on the police investigation into the original case. That investigation is of course ongoing and involves CT policing, local police and the security services, but it would be inappropriate for me to say anything further on that at this point.

Richard Benyon (Newbury) (Con): We can be sure that this incident will be used by Russian state misinformation campaigns to try further to obfuscate what happened in March. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is vital that we counter that through a steady drumbeat of telling the truth about what happened in March and of giving as much information about this incident as we can, when we can?

Sajid Javid: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to make that point. He will know that the Russian disinformation campaign has already begun. As soon as this news was made public yesterday, we saw that, certainly on social media. For that reason and many more, it is important that, as more evidence of what happened emerges, the UK, together with our international allies, presents that to the public and makes it very clear and very factual.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary for advance sight of his statement. As others have said, our immediate thoughts are with Charlie Rowley and Dawn Sturgess, whom we wish a very speedy and full recovery. They are completely innocent victims in this whole affair. I endorse the statements that have been made about our support for the emergency services; we can only wonder about the concern that they themselves must feel for their own personal safety when they cope with matters of this kind.
I particularly welcome the Home Secretary’s statement in two regards. First, it is important to reassure the public that there is no generalised threat to the wider community and dampen down irresponsible speculation that might be to the contrary. I also welcome the fact that he draws a distinction between the Russian people and the Russian state, particularly at this time. We should try hard to make sure that that message resonates within Russia itself, particularly given the events that are happening there at the moment.

I wish to press the Home Secretary in two respects. First, he says that people will naturally be concerned to understand the link, if any, between this incident and the Skripal case. Is it possible for him to identify whether the Novichok in this instance is from the same batch as was used in the Skripal case, or will that not be possible, and will he therefore not be able to say whether there is a direct link? Secondly, he has updated the House on the expulsion of diplomats, but, of course, there was a great range of other measures discussed as well in response to the incident on 4 March. If he is not able to do this now, can he say when he will be in a position to update the House on other matters, particularly with regard to the seizure of Russian state assets and to improving checks at our borders?

Sajid Javid: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response. Again, he has made a number of important points. I join him in commending the work of the emergency services; their response has been absolutely exceptional both back in March and, from what we have seen, in the past few days. He is also right to emphasise the distinction between the Russian people and the Russian state. Our quarrel is with the Russian state, not with the Russian people. In the World cup so far, the Russian people’s response and welcome to British fans and to the British team has been very nice to see, which emphasises the point that he has made.

The hon. Gentleman asked two questions: one about the nerve agent and the second about Russian action. On the nerve agent, scientists from Porton Down are absolutely clear that this is the exact same type of nerve agent from the Novichok family of nerve agents that was used in the March attack, so we are very clear on that. He asked specifically about the batch. We cannot attribute this to the same batch at this point, but scientists will be looking into that. I have been told that that may not even be possible because of a number of factors, but we cannot rule out, of course, that it was from the same batch. Although we are comfortable that it is the exact same nerve agent, we cannot at this point say that it is from the exact same batch.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about any further action against Russia. I think that I said in the statement that, as we continue with the investigation and as evidence emerges, we will respond accordingly.

Sir David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): I strongly support my right hon. Friend’s statement today and the information that he has given us. Obviously, local people will need maximum reassurance. Will he reaffirm that the risk to the general public is very low and that the Government’s top priority is the safety and wellbeing of local residents?

Sajid Javid: I am very happy to reaffirm that. The statements made yesterday by the chief medical officer and Public Health England were very reassuring; the risk to the public remains low. There is advice from the chief medical officer for those whom I mentioned briefly in my statement—those who believe that they may have been in some of the same areas that are now cordoned off to take some precautionary action. That kind of belt and braces approach is very appropriate, but the risk to the public remains very low.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome the Home Secretary’s statement. Our police, intelligence officers and medical staff are among the best in the world, and I know that they will be doing everything possible to keep people safe and to pursue this vile crime against this couple and the original Skripal attack. Can he confirm that he has had no co-operation from the Russian Government, which would be both revealing and shocking in itself? Will he also say a little bit more about Novichok and whether or how it degrades or deteriorates and how easy it is to detect, as he will be aware that there is already conflicting information and, potentially, misinformation being circulated on this?

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her question. First, I can confirm that we have had no co-operation from the Russian Government, but given their responsibility for the original attack and their campaign of disinformation, no one in the House should be surprised about that. I have made it clear today that, if the Russians wanted to respond in a positive way and provide more information—for example, on Novichok and on how they disposed of the nerve agent, if they did—they could, but they have clearly chosen not to. I have no doubt that, in the coming days and weeks, we will see an increased campaign of disinformation from the Russian state.

The right hon. Lady specifically asks about Novichok and that type of nerve agent. Like all nerve agents, it will deteriorate over some time, but my understanding is that, in the case of this type of nerve agent, that some time could be months and months. Therefore, it is scientifically perfectly possible that this nerve agent came from the same batch; it could well be the exact same nerve agent that was used in March because it would not have had enough time to deteriorate in any meaningful way.

The right hon. Lady also asks about detecting a nerve agent. It is not easy to detect at all. Detection equipment is available for radioactive substances, but detecting a nerve agent is a very different matter and there is no easy way at all to detect it. There are some ways to help find it, but it is hard to detect. That said, the considerable experience that we built up back in March will help us in responding to this incident, too.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. Understandably, a significant number of Members wish to participate in these exchanges and to question the Home Secretary. There is a debate to follow on proxy voting, which is well subscribed and which risks having very little time left for it. If that were to transpire, it would be open to the Government to reschedule that debate on another occasion so that Members
were not disappointed, but, in the meantime, if people could ask short questions and the Home Secretary could provide short replies that would help.

**Helen Whately** (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): It is quite extraordinary and shocking to hear the statements that are already coming out of Russia. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is really important that we work with our international allies to counter the fake news and the disinformation coming from Russia and others?

**Sajid Javid**: Yes, I very much agree with my hon. Friend. That is exactly what we have been doing, especially since the incident in March. This recent incident is a reminder that there is more to do.

**Sir Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): I thank the Home Secretary for his excellent statement and join others in celebrating his distinction between our condemnation of the Russian Government and our support for the Russian people. His careful phrasing today and his diplomatic sensitivity is vital. Will he reassure the House that all Ministers will follow his lead and his calm strength?

**Sajid Javid**: Yes, absolutely.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): May I stress the need to support local organisations? Budgeting in an annual budget cycle for an international chemical weapons attack simply does not happen, so the local council, the local hospital, the local police force and local businesses need financial support from central Government, and they need it quickly.

**Sajid Javid**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on that point. He will recall that, when the previous incident happened, I was the Local Government Secretary and was very much aware of that. We provided support then, and we will certainly be providing support again this time.

**Mr Pat McFadden** (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): The Home Secretary referred in his statement to the strong solidarity that Britain’s allies had shown to us in the wake of the Skripal incident a few months ago. Is he confident that we can maintain strong solidarity in the wake of this incident among liberal democracies, and does he agree that that is essential when the forces of nationalism are on the rise in a number of countries?

**Sajid Javid**: I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Having that unity among freedom-loving nations is very important in the face of this type of incident. There are a number of important multilateral events coming up: the western Balkans summit, the NATO summit and the visit to the UK by the President of America. Those are all fresh opportunities to build on that solidarity.

**Victoria Prentis** (Banbury) (Con): When does the Home Secretary expect the police to be able to update the public?

**Sajid Javid**: I understand that people will want to hear from the police investigation as soon as possible, but from what I heard from the police in the briefing I received this morning, it will take some time. We need to give them that time, but I assure my hon. Friend that as we get more information we will bring it to this House immediately.

**John Woodcock** (Barrow and Furness) (Indy): If and when the Government come to the conclusion that Russia was responsible for this attack—whether through targeting or by accident—will the Government pursue further co-ordinated action with our allies in response?

**Sajid Javid**: We absolutely need to keep all options open. I think that the hon. Gentleman would understand that the focus right here and now—certainly in today’s Cobra meeting—is very much on public safety, the police investigation and supporting the victims. I am sure that we will be considering other options as more information comes to light.

**Craig Tracey** (North Warwickshire) (Con): Obviously, this situation is distressing and it is being monitored by many of our constituents all around the country. Will my right hon. Friend reassure the House that the incident is being treated with the utmost seriousness and that the Government are being regularly updated on developments?

**Sajid Javid**: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. From the moment we knew about the incident, we have responded in that way—and not just the Government, but, just as importantly, local emergency services, the local council, local police and counter-terrorism police. We will keep treating the situation as an absolute priority.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What more can the Government do to tackle the misinformation coming out from the Russian state about this issue?

**Sajid Javid**: The hon. Lady asks another important question. There are no easy ways. Since the March incident we—not just the Government, but the wider responsible media, Members of Parliament and others—have learnt to call out misinformation whenever we see it. This misinformation is often directed not only at us or the British public, but at a wider international audience, so working with our international allies can also help.

**Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): From the statement today and statements after the March incident, it is quite clear that our agencies are world-leading and well recognised as being so throughout the world. Will the Secretary of State reassure the House that those agencies will have all the resources that they need to get to the bottom of this situation?

**Sajid Javid**: Yes. As my hon. Friend will know, a number of agencies and organisations are involved in addressing this incident—to deal not only with the criminal investigation, but the health issues—and I can give my hon. Friend that assurance.

**Mike Gapes** (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The St Petersburg troll factories and the RT propaganda channel are already gearing up to spread misinformation. Could we not at least do a little bit more to expose this? In particular, would Members of all parties in this House not appear on Putin’s propaganda television channel?
Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this issue. There have been far too many incidents when Members have sadly supported the Russian propaganda regime, and RT is one way in which they have done so. If any Member has an ounce of common sense, they will realise—especially after this second incident—that the British public will not support any of them if they support President Putin.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The Croatian Prime Minister told me last week at the Council of Europe that the evidence that made him expel a Russian diplomat had been absolutely compelling. Will the Home Secretary ensure that the evidence that he produces will be just as compelling in this case?

Sajid Javid: This is an opportunity to highlight just how seriously we take evidence and the facts. Already our world-leading scientists have been involved in the identification of the nerve agent in this incident, and that is exactly how we will proceed. As we gather that evidence, of course we will discuss it with our international allies.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Home Secretary is right to draw a distinction between the Russian Government and the Russian people. With a potential clash between Russia and England in the World cup, what conversations has he had with the Foreign Secretary to ensure that English fans in Russia are being kept up to date through regularly updated Foreign Office travel advice?

Sajid Javid: Even before the World cup started, a robust and well-thought-through plan was put in place after work between my Department, the police and others to support British fans in Russia. In the light of this incident, we will certainly be reviewing that information. There is nothing at this point to indicate that the risk to fans in Russia has changed in any way, but we want to keep that under review.

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): Novichok was developed by the Soviet Union in the '70s and '80s. It is down to the Russians to fill in the gaps. If they cannot do so, the assumption has to be made as it has been. Will the Home Secretary absolutely assure us that—notwithstanding our success going into the World cup and the way in which we have warmed towards the Russian people—we will not let up on the Russian state, which stands accused of attempting to murder our citizens?

Sajid Javid: I can absolutely give my hon. Friend that assurance. He will understand that although this incident has a leading line of inquiry—the connection with the previous incident—we do not want to jump to conclusions. If it is established that the Russian state is entirely responsible for this incident as well, of course we will consider what further action we can take.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Russia is receiving lots of positive coverage at the moment because of the World cup. Therefore, tackling the disinformation issue is that much more important. Has the Home Secretary or anyone else called in the Russian ambassador to hold him to account for this incident and to say that the level of disinformation that Russia is propagating is completely unacceptable and will be challenged?

Sajid Javid: At this point, we have not called in the Russian ambassador. We will want to consider what further action we can take as this investigation develops, and that may well include speaking to the Russian ambassador.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): The Amesbury incident is shocking, and I wish the pair affected a swift recovery. I am deeply concerned for Salisbury’s local economy and community. Will my right hon. Friend commit to the necessary support for Wiltshire to get through this? Will he also stress again that the Government’s priority is the safety of residents and that the risk to Wiltshire residents remains low?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend is right to raise this point. As a local MP, she will be concerned and will be hearing concerns from her constituents. I can give her that commitment: we will support the local economy, local businesses and local people in every way that we can. I discussed the matter this morning with the Communities Secretary, who shares that desire to help in every way that we can.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I commend my right hon. Friend for his statement. This must, understandably, be a time of great anxiety for local residents. Will he confirm that they are receiving all the public health advice that we can provide?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I can confirm that. There will obviously be more advice to come, as we learn more from the chief medical officer and Public Health England. The police and other agencies are working closely with the health authorities to ensure that the public health advice is updated at all times. Let me reiterate that the advice from the chief medical officer and Public Health England is that the risk to the public remains low.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): The Salisbury attack and Russian disinformation shows how important it is to continue saying our side of the story. I understand that the BBC World Service is considering a considerable uplift in its broadcasting activities in the Balkans, eastern Europe and on the borders of Russia. Will the Home Secretary consider giving his support to the BBC World Service at this time, because it is clearly crucial to our safety at home?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend raises an important point. It is right that we look at how we can counter much of the disinformation out there that is coming from Russia, and the BBC World Service can play an important role in doing so.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): There will be a great temptation to engage in speculation following this latest incident. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the police must be given the space that they need to be able to fully investigate the facts and establish exactly what happened?
Sajid Javid: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. As she will know, the police investigation has already begun. From the moment that this was declared a major incident, it has involved not just local policing but substantial support from counter-terrorism policing. Over 100 officers from counter-terrorism policing are already involved in this new incident. We will continue to make sure that they get the resources that are needed and are given the time to complete their work.

Chris Skidmore (Kingswood) (Con): On Sunday, I drove through Salisbury on my way to the excellent Chalk valley history festival, also attended by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Driving through the city, one cannot but be struck by the historic beauty of Salisbury, particularly its cathedral. Obviously, Salisbury’s local economy is highly dependent on international tourism. Will the Home Secretary send out a message to those people intending to visit Salisbury and nearby Stonehenge that they must continue to do so against the threat of what is effectively terrorism? They should attend Stonehenge, go to Salisbury and enjoy the wonderful historic sites.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is himself a distinguished historian. I trust that he was not merely attending the festival but orating at it.

Chris Skidmore indicated assent.

Sajid Javid: That is very reassuring to all Members.

Sajid Javid: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. Obviously, Salisbury is one of the most beautiful places in our country—[Interruption.] My hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen) shouts, “On earth.” I think we will have to agree with him on that. Whether by visiting Salisbury itself, nearby towns and villages or Stonehenge, this is a very good way that we can show our support. I would not only encourage members of the public to continue with their plans, but suggest that perhaps it is time to give ourselves an extra reason to make such a plan and be more determined to make a specific, special visit.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your advice on a matter that has caused me some concern. While I was out of the country representing the United Kingdom at the Council of Europe, I received an email from an organisation called Global Justice Now. It told me that I would have received emails over the weekend from my constituents with the subject, “MPs not border guards”. It said that owing to a filtering system failure in its organisation, constituents would be thanking me for signing a pledge, which in fact I had not done, nor am I aware that I had even been asked to do so. This pledge apparently said that if anybody visited a constituency surgery of mine who was an illegal immigrant, I would undertake not to report them to the authorities.

I am really concerned, Mr Speaker, that an unaccountable organisation can actually send out information to my constituents about activities in my constituency surgery, effectively telling lies about me, and I have no opportunity to correct it. I appreciate that I am putting this on the record with you now, but could you perhaps take it away and look at how Members of Parliament can protect themselves against this sort of misinformation about their activities, because it is highly damaging and these organisations are not accountable?

Mr Speaker: I can well understand why the right hon. Lady is very perturbed about the matter. On hearing her explanation of the sequence of events, I rather imagine that other Members listening will be similarly concerned for her, and potentially for themselves. As she says, this organisation is not accountable. I have to admit that it is not an organisation of which I have previously heard, but I have now done so. The matter certainly warrants some thought, and I will give it that thought, including speaking about it to the Parliamentary Security Director on the right hon. Lady’s and others’ behalf. As and when I have anything to disclose to her or to the House, she or the House—possibly both—will hear it.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will come to the hon. Gentleman, but it would be a pity to squander him too early.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I want to raise with you an issue that I have encountered in recent days. The pedestrian entrance at Carriage Gates has relatively new card-swipe machines that are quite glitchy, and there have been a couple of occasions when I have struggled to get in—
[Alex Burghart]

fortunately not at a time when I was coming in for a vote. However, as someone who often cuts things quite fine in getting to the Chamber to vote, I would not want to find that I, or indeed other hon. Members, could not get through Carriage Gates in a hurry and that that affected our business in the Chamber. To whom should I report this concern, and what is the procedure for trying to address it?

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman could inform the Serjeant at Arms about the matter, or if he wishes to raise it with Eric Hepburn, the Parliamentary Security Director, it is open to him to do so. I think it is a fairly safe bet, though, that the Parliamentary Security Director will come to learn of the point that the hon. Gentleman has made. Clearly, it is very important that these glitches should be reduced to a minimum and that the system should be operationally efficient sooner rather than later.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I have just come from a sitting of the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill Committee. To say that temperatures in Committee Room 12 are bordering on stifling would be an understatement. We—Members—and officials are luckily at liberty to remove our jackets, but it was brought to my attention that the same courtesy is not extended to the Doorkeepers, who have to remain in full rig throughout, no matter what the temperature. Might you offer guidance on how action might be taken to allow our hard-working and dedicated Doorkeepers the same rights as ourselves in relation to making their working conditions as comfortable as possible in the current conditions?

Mr Speaker: Personally, I very much agree with that. It is not a matter that has been raised with me before. I remember that when I used to sit on the Panel of Chairs before my fortunate election to the office of Speaker, I was one of those who always took the view that in hot conditions Members should be able to take off their jackets. It was not a view universally held by Chairs. There were Chairs emanating from both sides of the House who took what I thought was an excessively trad view of the matter. However, the point that the hon. Gentleman makes is an important one. That which we make available to ourselves should be made more widely available. I would not want dedicated, hard-working, conscientious staff to be working in conditions of extreme discomfort, so I hope that that point can be registered. I think it is probably a matter of discretion for the Chair.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I understand that due to pressures of time, the Government have pulled the next debate on the principle of proxy voting in the House of Commons. That is of course a great shame, although I understand that there are pressing matters of state in play at the moment. On 1 February, we passed a motion in this House to look at proxy voting. The Procedure Committee, which I chair, published its report on 15 May. We are some two months from that point and five months plus from 1 February. I am a man of great patience, Mr Speaker, but babies are not as patient as I am. A number of colleagues who are expecting to give birth in the next few weeks were rather hoping that we would get on to this business, if not today, then perhaps next week.

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. We talk a lot about efficiency in this place, and we demand efficiency of business. I have to say that I do not see today as being a great example of efficiency when it comes to looking at the issue of baby leave. It is clear that we have to discuss issues that arise, such as the dreadful incident in Amesbury, but I urge the Government to look at rescheduling the baby leave debate as soon as possible. Time waits for no pregnant woman, and I can see a bump over there that is significantly bigger than it was five months ago when we first debated this issue.

Mr Speaker: I will respond to those points of order, but as I think it is on the same theme, I would like to hear from the shadow Leader of the House.

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. In support of what my colleagues have said, can we have an indication of when we are likely to get the debate back? It is quite urgent.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The biological clock is ticking. Last year I took maternity leave, and I suffered reputational damage due to one of the newspapers branding me a lazy MP who was not here for a lot of the time. Three of our colleagues are expecting babies in the next few months, and the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) has recently had her baby. I hope we can get proxy voting in place for the recess, in time for those hon. Members during their maternity leave.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. This is absolutely ridiculous. People have come here in good faith to debate baby leave, which is very important. As we have heard, time is pressing. Can the Government give us a date for when the debate will happen? Will it happen before recess? How many more babies have to be born to Members of the House before we get some modern practices in place to take care of those women and their babies?

Mr Speaker: I will respond to all these points at the end, but I may as well take the remaining points of order.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. If there is to be a delay to the debate on proxy voting, can we at least ensure that in the meantime, the pairing system operated by the Whips is giving our pregnant colleagues the flexibility that they need?

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I impress upon you and Members of the House, including members of the Government who might be listening,
that it was many months ago that we debated this issue and Members on both sides of the House made urgent and eloquent contributions about how important this was. That was in advance of us knowing how many colleagues might be affected, and now we are at a juncture at which many of our colleagues will be affected. The reputational issues for many of us who have previously been in this situation were extensive, and we do not know what is around the corner in terms of future elections. For a variety of reasons, it is critical that the Government respond.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. The motion on the Order Paper was just for a general debate. Perhaps matters could be shortened if the Government were now to table a substantive motion that could be debated next week. We could then reach a decision on this, because we were not going to be able to reach a decision today anyway.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I rise to support the Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker). Our Committee did this work at an accelerated pace and published a report some time ago, as he said. There is no reason whatsoever for this delay. As I said to the Leader of the House in business questions last week, we need to get on with this. I agree very much with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) that it would be a good idea to move to a vote on the recommendation of the Procedure Committee, which has diligently done its job under its excellent Chair.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Many Members have mentioned the bumps and the time pressure. There will also be expectant fathers, so to speak, who are feeling the time pressure.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. On that very theme, this is a picture of my daughter who will be born in the autumn, so I am particularly keen to see this measure put in place as soon as possible.

On a serious point, where is the Leader of the House? The Government have just unilaterally changed the business of the House this afternoon. I am the acting Whip for the Scottish National party today, and I found out by a rumour that this had happened. It is a gross discourtesy to the House, and the Leader of the House should have come to the Dispatch Box and made an announcement.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am not expecting a baby any time soon, but I have great sympathy for my colleagues on both sides of the House and fathers who are expecting. Would it be helpful to reassure colleagues that this House stands firmly behind expectant mothers and mothers who take leave from the House that they are not in dereliction of their duty and that no female Member should be traduced in this way? Would it also be helpful to confirm that the pairing system is alive and well and working, so that even if this excellent recommendation is not passed into the Standing Orders, people who are expecting babies or have to take maternity or paternity leave will be paired by our Whips Offices?

Mr Speaker: The Leader of the House has arrived; we are grateful to her.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I was in a position 25 years ago where I was told by the Chief Whip, “I’d be very happy for you to be there when your daughter is born, but be here on Monday night because we’ve got an important vote on Maastricht.” The birth of my child was therefore going to determine whether I was breaking the whip or not. Pairing is not satisfactory in those circumstances. We have to have proxy voting.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I am a member of the Procedure Committee, and we looked at this issue in great detail. Colleagues have spoken about pairing, but of course, pairing does not apply at the moment to Members from the Scottish National party. May I urge that similar arrangements be made for our SNP colleagues, to allow them to experience the same facility as Opposition or Government Members?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to colleagues for all their points of order. Let me emphasise that I understand completely how very disappointed and, indeed, aggrieved many Members are that the debate that had been scheduled will not now take place today. In fairness, I think it only reasonable to point out that from the Government’s point of view, it was a choice between having an extremely truncated debate of less than an hour or choosing not to move the motion. When the hon. Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) understandably complains that the debate was summarily withdrawn, he has a point, but the response to that is that of course, there was a motion for a general debate. The motion was to be moved by the Leader of the House, and if a motion is not moved, by definition, the debate cannot take place. I would not want to impugn anyone’s motives in this matter.

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom) rose—

Mr Speaker: Of course I will come to the Leader of the House.

I want simply to say at this stage the following. First, this matter has been considered over some period. I want to join the tributes to the excellent and indefatigable Chair of the Procedure Committee, the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker), whose Committee did treat of this matter in some detail. Indeed, as is not uncommon in relation to procedural matters, the Committee asked me whether I would be willing to give evidence to it, which I did. It is no secret whatsoever that I expressed support for the principle and practice of proxy voting in circumstances where people were enjoying or seeking to enjoy maternity or paternity leave. That was my very firm view. I appreciate that there may be a mixture of views on this matter, but that was my very firm view. [Interruption.] What has caused the amusement?

Vicky Ford: The “enjoyment” of maternity leave—it is very hard work, Mr Speaker.
Mr Speaker: Perhaps I should have used a more neutral term.

Secondly, I think it is not a secret that the support for this idea is not universal, and it is not specifically a party matter. There are people on both sides of the House—particularly those who are accustomed to operating through the usual channels—whose enthusiasm for the idea of proxy voting is, shall we say, not unalloyed. Whether that has anything to do with the way events have transpired today, I have no way of knowing. To be fair, the Home Secretary’s statement was very important, and that statement did have to be made. The Home Secretary was earlier, as he said, chairing Cobra and could not make his statement until he got here.

The Government’s rationale for choosing to have a statement on the industrial strategy is a matter for the Government. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the hon. Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), addressed us with his usual charm and courtesy. He displayed no little knowledge of the matters under discussion, and was widely questioned. Whether that statement had to be made today was a judgment for the Government to make.

As people have asked about when the debate might be rescheduled, I would say that I asked the Deputy Chief Whip, who courteously came to the Chair to inform me that the debate would not go ahead today, whether it would soon be rescheduled. He said that the Government would look to reschedule the debate, but that it would have to be done by agreement through the usual channels.

My own very firm view, having heard what colleagues have said, is that the debate, preferably on a substantive motion—to go back to the point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope)—so that the House can decide whether to proceed with proxy voting, should take place before the summer recess. It would be perfectly possible for that to happen, but it is for others to determine whether it shall. It would be my preference, but it is not to be decided by the Chair.

The Leader has come into the Chamber, and we appreciate that. She has also signalled that she wants to say something on this matter, and I think it is important that we hear from her.

Andrea Leadsom: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. May I say that nobody is more disappointed than I am that we have not been able to carry on with this debate? I have always made absolutely clear my 100% commitment to the vital importance of a secure early bond between parents and their babies. It is something for which I have had an absolute passion for 20 years, so nobody should be in any doubt about that.

I have had a number of meetings with colleagues. In fact, last November, when this issue was first raised with me, I asked the Chairman of the Procedure Committee whether the Committee would be so good as to look into how to provide proxy voting arrangements for baby leave. He was kind enough to do so, and I pay tribute to him and to all members of the Procedure Committee for their very well-considered report.

The purpose of today’s debate was to open up the discussion about what would actually be quite a significant change to the conventions of the House. My speech, were I delivering it, would have asked Members open questions about how they believe this could best be handled, whether there are alternatives and, indeed, whether there might be unintended consequences. My intention was to facilitate such a debate.

You are absolutely right, Mr Speaker, that the events in Wiltshire meant that the Home Secretary could not get to the House to make his statement until after the end of Cobra. Unfortunately, that has led to our having insufficient time to air the issues under discussion properly today. It is absolutely my intention to bring back that debate as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: I am very grateful to the Leader of the House for what she has said. Colleagues, I think we have all put our cards on the table, and we need to leave the issue there for today. However, knowing the perspicacity of my colleagues and the strength of feeling that exists among them—not least the Chairs of the Procedure and the Women and Equalities Committees, to name but two—there is no way on earth that this issue will go away, even if anybody in the House, and I know the Leader of the House does not want it to do so, thought that it could be pushed into the long grass. Thinking that would be a triumph of optimism and self-delusion over reality and common sense, and no one would want knowingly to be guilty of that.
Backbench Business

Transforming Care Programme

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Back-Bench motion on the future of the transforming care programme. I am pleased to say that the Member who is due to move the motion is in the Chamber. This is not a laughing matter, but, sadly, not many Members wish to speak in the debate, so it could finish early. Alternatively, the sheer breadth and depth of the learning of the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), together with his capacity to expatiate with great eloquence on it, could lead to a very full debate.

1.54 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned at the slow progress made under the Transforming Care programme, which was set up to improve the care and quality of life of children and adults with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges; recognises that a substantial number of people with learning disabilities remain trapped in, and continue to be inappropriately admitted to, Assessment and Treatment Units rather than living with support in the community; is further concerned at the lack of capacity within community services; notes evidence of the neglect, abuse, poor care, and premature deaths of people with learning disabilities; believes that the Transforming Care programme is unlikely to realise the ambitions set out in the Building the Right Support strategy before it ends in March 2019; calls on the Government to establish, prioritise, and adequately resource a Support strategy before it ends in March 2019; and urges the Government to take action now to stop the abuse of people's human rights and promotes their independence and wellbeing.

May I thank the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating this important debate? Although the number of Members who have indicated a desire to speak is low, this incredibly important issue deserves to be debated in the House. I thank the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes), together with other Members, for joining me in making the application for the debate. I have worked very closely with her on this issue, which we both care very much about.

I thank a number of voluntary sector organisations that have been incredibly helpful in preparing for this debate. I particularly want to mention the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, which is led by the very impressive Viv Cooper, as well as Mencap, the National Autistic Society, the Voluntary Organisations Disability Group and Shared Lives Plus.

It is perhaps sobering that we are debating this issue on the 70th anniversary of the NHS. I say that as someone who is a very strong supporter of the NHS, but for the people we are talking about in this debate, the record has not been a good one. The system has let down too many individuals and too many families. On this very significant day, it is important to recognise that the NHS has a lot of work to do to repair the damage that has been done to so many people, and to treat them properly.

The origins of the transforming care programme lie in the horror of the Winterbourne View scandal, which Members will remember. In that private hospital, people with learning disabilities and autism were abused and assaulted behind locked doors over a sustained period, and that was only revealed by brave whistleblowers. In the aftermath of that horror, I invited the families of those who had been patients in Winterbourne View to come to the Department of Health—I became a Health Minister in September 2012—to talk to me about their concerns.

I clearly remember a father called Steve Sollars, who talked to me about how he had watched his son become, in his words, increasingly zombie-like as he was pumped full of anti-psychotic drugs. Steve described how he tried to complain to the local authority and the primary care trust, as it was in those days, and said that he was just completely ignored. It really struck home when he said, “I felt guilty that I couldn’t do anything for my son.” I was left thinking how dreadful it was that we had got to a position in which state agencies had left an individual—a father—feeling guilty because they were ignoring his pleas for something to be done.

In the following months and years, I met some other parents of individuals trapped in hospital—sometimes in unattractive institutions—for long periods, all of whom felt that no one was listening to them. I refer in particular to Phill Wills, who campaigned brilliantly on behalf of his son Josh, who was stuck in a hospital in Birmingham for more than two years. The family live in Cornwall, so they had to make an incredible journey just to maintain contact with their little son.

I also met Shahana Hussein, the aunt of a girl called Fauzia, who was in St Andrew’s in Northampton. She talked to me about her fears of how her niece appeared to be trapped there. She was anxious that that might be her life course, and that she would never emerge from that place. I met Lynne McCarrick, whose son Chris had been stuck in Calderstones undergoing inappropriate treatment for a very long time, and Lorna and Sid, the parents of Simone, who is still stuck in hospital nine years after her first admission. For much of that time, she has been a long distance away from home, therefore making it impossible for her parents to visit, which is shocking in this day and age. Many of those families are present for today’s debate, and they remain extremely concerned about their loved ones and others who remain trapped in institutions.

The conclusion that I reached at that time, which I still hold, is that individuals’ human rights are routinely ignored and breached in serious ways. Someone who is convicted of a criminal offence and then sent to prison—other than the cohort who have received indeterminate sentences—generally knows the date of their release. However, people who go into institutions and their families do not know a release date, and many people stay in those institutions for much of their lives, which is shocking. To put it bluntly, they are treated as second-class citizens. I said that at the time, and I still say it now, because not enough has changed for any of us to be comfortable with the situation.

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) on the leadership they have shown by securing this debate through the Backbench Business Committee. The right hon. Gentleman said that this programme came out of the Winterbourne View scandal,
which was back in 2011. Does he share my concern that we are discussing this issue seven years later in 2018 and yet thousands of people in our country—thousands!—are still in institutional care? It is an absolute disgrace that we find ourselves discussing this issue.

**Norman Lamb:** I completely agree. That sense of complete injustice and the denial of human rights still exists. Nothing much has changed, which is why the debate is so important, and I share the hon. Lady’s view that we should not tolerate this scandal. What makes the situation even worse is that this is not a demand for vast amounts of extra public money; it is about how public money is spent. Our demand is that money is spent in a way that respects people’s human rights and gives them the chance of a good, happy life in the community, with the support of care workers, friends and family, rather than being trapped in institutions. It is shocking that the situation for very many people has remained exactly the same as it was all those years ago.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): As my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said, it is shocking that it has taken seven years for us to get even this far. I have noticed that although on the one hand the national health service encourages whistleblowers, on the other hand it sometimes litigates to stop whistleblowers, so there is a contradiction. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if people had taken notice of whistleblowers, some of these things might never have happened?

**Norman Lamb:** I do agree, and that is another big subject that I will be pursuing further in the light of the Gosport inquiry, which I established when I was a Minister. In that case, brave nurses tried to blow the whistle in 1991, but they were shut down by management and unable to pursue their concerns. More than 456 people lost their lives as a result of the inappropriate prescribing of opioids, and that was because whistleblowers—brave staff members—were not listened to. In every part of our health service, we must ensure that people feel able to speak up and that they have the legal rights to do so.

The outcome of our deliberations in the Department was to establish the transforming care programme, which was published in December 2012. Interestingly, it was pursued as a concordat and an agreed programme of action. It was supported by an amazing array of organisations, all of whose logos appeared in the document, including—critically—NHS England. Every organisation that signed up to the programme committed to “working together, with individuals and their families—note the phrase “with individuals and their families”—and with the groups that represent them, to deliver real change.”

That was in December 2012. These organisations that had committed “to deliver real change” also stated: “Our shared objective is to see the health and care system get to grips with past failings by listening to this very vulnerable group of people and their families, meeting their needs and working together to commission the range of support which will enable them to lead fulfilling and safe lives in their communities.

To put it bluntly, there has been a shameful failure on that commitment to change, which simply has not happened for the majority of people involved.

At that time we were operating in a fog. No data had been collected historically on the numbers of people in beds in institutions, so we had to rely on periodic censuses to find out whether anything was changing. When we conducted a census about 18 months after the start of the programme, it was shocking to discover that there had effectively been no change—it was business as usual. The really disturbing thing was that many private sector organisations were making substantial investments in new facilities and delivering the wrong model of care. Why did those organisations have the confidence to make major million-pound investments in inappropriate care? It seems to me that to justify such investment, they must have had reassurance from somewhere in the system that things would carry on as they were. It was shocking to discover the extent to which it was simply business as usual.

**Luciana Berger:** I apologise if the right hon. Gentleman is going to come on to this, but I want to reflect on the reports commissioned by NHS England and Sir Stephen Bubb. Back in 2014, Sir Stephen was commissioned to write a report entitled “Winterbourne View – Time for Change”, yet nothing happened in the wake of that report, other than a closure programme that was published back in 2015, on which we have seen little progress. In February 2016, Sir Stephen Bubb published another report entitled “Time for Change – The Challenge Ahead”, which again demanded urgent action. Does the right hon. Gentleman share my concern that although those reports were commissioned, there was very little response or action taken?

**Norman Lamb:** Again, I entirely share the hon. Lady’s view. I work closely with Sir Stephen Bubb and we have exactly the same view about this. He and I attended a meeting about a year ago with NHS England to discuss progress, or the lack of it. The hon. Lady is right to say that there is a culture of looking at things again and again, and then doing nothing about the conclusions reached, which is wholly unacceptable.

At that time, three issues stood out, and they involved perverse incentives that acted to prevent change from happening. First—this is extraordinary—the person who was making the critical decision about whether an individual should stay in a bed or be discharged was, and still is, the clinician employed by the provider organisation that makes money out of the person staying in the bed. That total conflict of interest has never been confronted. As Minister, I kept asking NHS England to act to address that issue, but it has not yet been resolved.

If a private sector organisation is earning £4,000 or £5,000 every week from someone being in a bed, there is a strong incentive to keep them in that bed. There is also an incentive for public sector organisations that want to maintain their existence, and that conflict of interest has never been confronted.

Secondly, there is a complete failure to invest properly in community provision. This is all about the need to shift resources from institutional care to community support; in other words, shifting money from NHS England to local authorities. The original transforming care concordat made it clear that there should be a
pooling of resources between specialist commissioning, clinical commissioning groups and local authorities. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree said, seven years after the programme was announced, we are still waiting for a proper pooling of resources so that the money can actually shift and investment can be made in community resources.

The third insight I had at that time was the most extraordinary and wholly unacceptable exclusion of families and individuals from any decisions that were being made about their care. This, I am afraid, continues today. It is very far from the personalised care that the NHS and the Government say they are committed to. In the light of what I saw as our complete collective failure to deliver that change—this was the thing that caused me most distress as Minister—I decided that we had to come up with new proposals for new legal rights, so that families and individuals could challenge decisions that were being made behind their backs about where they would be cared for and treated.

Shortly before the 2015 general election, we published a Green Paper. I think in March 2015, called, “No Voice Unheard, No Right Ignored”. It has an important title, but I am afraid that those rights and those voices are still unheard and ignored because it has never been implemented. Nothing proposed in the Green Paper has been taken forward by the Government. We now have a review of the Mental Health Act 1983, so there is another opportunity to address the scandalous lack of rights for individuals, but the time it will take before there is any legislation will be very long—I doubt whether it will be in this Parliament—and families will just be left waiting.

At that time I worked with Sara Ryan, a remarkable woman and the mother of Connor Sparrowhawk, known as Laughing Boy. He was a young man in the “care” of Southern Health who lost his life while he was within its institution. He drowned in a bath because of neglect. The Health and Safety Executive had decided not to investigate the case. I intervened and asked it to reconsider.

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It then decided that it could investigate and eventually, years later, prosecutions and convictions followed. The result of the tragedy that struck that family was that Sara Ryan and an amazing group of people worked together to produce a Bill that would have strengthened the rights of individuals. We worked closely with them in the production of that Green Paper.

Because no progress was being made following the 2015 general election, the Government and NHS England embarked on a new process. In October 2015, they published a document called “Building the Right Support”. The plan was to close between 35% and 50% of in-patient beds and, critically, ensure that local areas developed the right community support by—this is the critical date—March next year. The plan involved the creation of 48 transforming care partnerships covering the whole country. These partnerships between NHS England specialist regional commissioners, local authorities and CCGs were to facilitate the shift of money from NHS England to local authorities, so that people could be cared for in the community.

There was a plan for people who had already been in in-patient care for more than five years at April 2016 to be more facilitated into their transition into community support. When campaigners asked how many dowries had been provided, NHS England said it did not know because it did not have any records on that. What kind of implementation of a national programme is it when we do not even know, and have no way of telling, how many dowries have been delivered? And why was it just for that one cohort of people? Surely every person stuck in a hospital or institution has the right to have the money go with them on their journey back into the community. I want to know from the Government how many dowries have been delivered so far and whether they will become part of the programme in the future.

As I said, the programme ends in March next year, alongside other work on learning disabilities which campaigners are concerned will continue—I will come back to that at the end—including the learning disabilities mortality review. There has already been a lot of concern expressed about how the annual report was slipped out the day after the local election at the beginning of May. The report contained pretty shocking findings, with life expectancy falling massively short of the rest of us—for men by about 22 years; for women, by 29 years—without any clear justification. Some 13% of the cohort of people looked at in the mortality review were cases where the person’s health had been adversely affected by delays in care or treatment, gaps in services or organisational dysfunction, neglect or abuse. Those findings are shocking and concerning. The question for the Government, which I will come back to, is what happens with the findings of mortality reviews. We can all express concern when they are published, but unless there is a plan of action to address the failings identified in them then nothing will change.

The nine principles in the “Building the Right Support” document are very good. They are all focused on personalised care and getting people into the community, which we all agree must happen.

Luciana Berger: I normally would not make so many interventions and I hope the right hon. Gentleman is happy to take them—I thank him greatly. I just want to reflect a bit more on the learning disabilities mortality review. The title is quite technical, but it comes back to what he opened his speech with: we are discussing thousands of the most vulnerable people in our country and we have a responsibility to do everything we can to compensate for the fact that they are so vulnerable. The mortality review, launched in May of the previous year, found that one in eight of the deaths reviewed showed there had been abuse, neglect, delays in treatment or gaps in care. Today we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS. Is it not a sad reflection that, amidst all the positivity, we need to do something about this issue so urgently?

Norman Lamb: I totally agree. It is, as I said at the start, sobering. In a way, all of us who strongly support the NHS must not laud it as a perfect institution with nothing to complain about. As far as this group of people are concerned, they have been very badly let down. Fundamentally, in many cases they have died early through neglect. That is intolerable in this day and age.

The nine principles, which are positive and empowering, are really good. I sign up to them completely. It is the implementation that is lacking and has largely failed. I say to the Minister that she is very fortunate to be in her wonderful job. My great frustration is that this programme came early in my time as Minister, but I learned, as I did...
the job, just how critically important implementation is. You think that by establishing good principles and getting everyone to agree to implement them those organisations will do what they have committed to do. It was probably naïve to think that. The reality was that nothing changed and it still has not changed. One critically important lesson to learn from that failure is to have a total, obsessive focus on implementation and national leadership.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that to achieve transformation in care, investment needs to be put into alternatives in the community before it is possible to free vulnerable people from these institutions, and that far too often, the public sector tries to make savings before it has made the investment in the things that will achieve the same?

**Norman Lamb**: The hon. Gentleman makes a really important point, and I totally agree. I said at the start that this is not a great demand for a whole load more money. However, some up-front investment is needed, not only in establishing the facilities in the community, but in training people in the community, and I will come back to that in a little while.

**Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I add my voice to others in the Chamber in saying that I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for securing the debate, and I hope to catch the Chair’s eye to make a contribution on autism. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that when it comes to financing and co-ordination, a lot can be learnt from the National Audit Office report from 2017 that looked specifically at progress in the transforming care programme? Does he also agree that it is quite worrying that the NAO said that it was concerned about the programme’s overall progress and whether it would achieve value for money? One of the problems that it pointed out was that some of the local partnerships were “struggling to put in place appropriate accommodation quickly enough”. which had led to delays in people coming out of hospital and perhaps not the correct co-ordination to provide the services that are so desperately required by this vulnerable group of people.

**Norman Lamb**: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention, although it was a bit freaky, because I was about to come on to the National Audit Office report. She is absolutely right in identifying the criticism that it made of progress on this programme.

Let me deal with the numbers involved. As I said, the commitment was to close between 35% and 50% of in-patient learning disability and autism beds and to provide alternative arrangements in the community by March next year. The document, “Building the Right Support”, mentioned getting 2,600 beds down to between 1,300 and 1,700 beds, which is a very significant drop. Hitting the minimum drop that the Government committed to of 35% would involve the closure of 922 beds. Of that total, 531 still need to be closed in what is now a very short space of time.

The latest data, from the end of May, shows that there are still 2,400 people in institutions, 41% of whom are over 50 km away from home. I think hon. Members will think about what that means. Many of those families are not wealthy, and some people are themselves disabled. If their loved one—their child—is put in an institution a long way from home, it can sometimes be impossible to maintain contact. Just imagine—all of us—what that must mean to people to lose touch with their vulnerable child. It is not acceptable, but it persists today, and according to that latest data from the end of May, the length of stay is still over five years. There has been very little change in the length of stay. Perhaps most troubling of all from that latest data is that the number of children in in-patient beds has more than doubled. For goodness’ sake, this programme is about moving away from institutional care, yet between March 2015 and May 2018, we have doubled the number of children in institutions. This is intolerable and in a little while, I will come back to why that is not necessary if things are done properly.

I find myself in a horrible position of expressing anxiety about closing the rest of those beds by March next year, but it is important for the Minister to note that there is a real fear on the part of families and the organisations that represent them about a big risk in a head-long dash to close beds by the deadline in cases where many people have complex needs. Some people in units that have been earmarked either for closure or reductions in beds, apparently defined as “impacted sites” in the system, will not be going home but will have to be shunted somewhere else in the country. Of course, a move for someone who has very complex needs can be massively destabilising. If this is done in a hurry to meet a target because there has been a failure of the programme to date to prepare community resources, it will be a disaster for the individuals involved. For those able to live in the community who are still in institutional care, there is a massive concern that not enough has been done to develop community services or train the workforce. We have to avoid the risk of discharging people only to readmit them weeks or months later.

I mention the really shocking case of a young lad called Eden. He has been failed throughout his life, from childhood into adulthood. He has been in hospital for more than 10 years. His mother, Deb, is desperate. She constantly fights against the system, which does not listen to her. He is in a hospital in Norfolk, and they live in London. She has long journeys—a 10-hour round trip or something of that sort—to visit him. She is not wealthy. Eventually—I visited Eden in that hospital—she got him home to a facility near their home in west London, but because arrangements had not been made properly by the local authority to have the proper support services in place, within weeks he was back in that institution again. That individual has been horribly failed by the NHS—by the system—and it is wholly unacceptable.

The consequences of the failure to get people out of institutions include, as I said, the loss of contact with family. Care behind closed doors often involves unacceptable practices, hidden from view. I mentioned Fauzia earlier, who was admitted to St Andrew’s hospital in Northampton—she was a child of 15 at the time. Her family asked me to go and visit her. It is an unusual thing for a Minister to do, but I decided to go at the
invitation not of the institution, but of the family. I went to see her and she was living in what I would describe as “a cell”. This is a 15-year-old girl. She suffered from the constant use of force—restraint—and she was being put into seclusion in another room that was completely bare, with concrete walls. She had a tiny exercise yard. This girl was in there for over two years. It was really shocking—a total abuse of her human rights. She had no life at all, yet from the day that she was discharged, when we finally got a review undertaken, there has been no more restraint. She went to a brilliant place called Alderwood, also in Northamptonshire. The people who work there have never had to use restraint against her, because they have been trained, crucially—the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) will know about this—in how autism affects the individual, which so often does not happen in big institutions.

I visited Faizia at Alderwood. She has a very happy life. She is outdoors much of the time, happy and contented—still very complex, but not in the horribly alien environment that she was in in St Andrew’s. St Andrew’s is receiving a fortune in Government money—taxpayers’ money—in many cases to treat people using the wrong model of care, trapping them in this institution. It has invested in a very substantial new unit. It may be smart—I am told that it is—but why are we making this investment in new in-patient facilities when children should not be going into hospital, unless there is an absolutely exceptional circumstance?

I also visited Josh, who I mentioned earlier. He had been in a hospital in Birmingham that had cared for him well, but he was far away from home. He has now made a substantial improvement and is developing brilliantly. He has a life again, and he is happy with his family. It is inspiring to see what people are doing to support individuals in those community settings.

What have the Government done to assess the progress of this programme? The Department of Health commissioned an independent review of transforming care partnerships, allocated £1 million to it and put it out to tender, but I am told that it has now been pulled and will not go ahead. Why? I understand that it might be because NHS England is also, bizarrely, commissioning an independent review, but we have only had provisional results from that. When will we know more? Those provisional results are disturbing. They show that, in quarter 3 of 2017-18, only 35 of the 48 transforming care partnerships had intensive support services to look after adults 24/7 in their own homes across the whole area of the partnership. Those services are required by the Government’s document, and they are critical to ensuring that people can be safe at home, yet only 35 out of 48 partnerships have them in place.

Only 23—less than half—of the partnerships had intensive support services for children and young people, so it is little wonder that we have seen a doubling of the number of children going into institutions. Only 19 had adult community forensics services across the whole area, and only 14 had children and young people’s community forensics services across the area. There is no detail at all about what the services that are in place actually consist of. All we have is a tick-box exercise to show whether there is a service in place. As the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) rightly identified, there is so much missing from community support that would enable people to be safely discharged and return home.

The National Audit Office report, to which the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham referred, made a pretty damning assessment in 2017. It questioned the credibility of the transforming care partnership plans and highlighted the fact that care and treatment reviews were not taking place as promised. Those reviews are supposed to be carried out for every individual in in-patient care every six months, yet, as of May this year, only 54% had had one in the past six months, and 390 patients—16% of the total—had not had one for more than a year. Why not? If the programme is being properly implemented, with proper national leadership, surely those reviews should happen in every case, every six months.

The NAO made the case that money was not transferring quickly enough from hospitals to the community and that there was still no effective mechanism to guarantee that that would happen. It identified an absence of workforce plans for community provision and found that most transforming care partnerships did not intend to produce such plans until 2019. Well, how the hell are they going to meet the target of this dramatic reduction in beds by March 2019 if they do not produce workforce plans until that time? That is completely the wrong way round.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I happen to agree with the right hon. Gentleman. Does he expect the Minister to be able to tell us what has happened to the extra £2 billion of investment that the Government have made in social care services since March last year? It seems to me that something is not quite right about the co-ordination in this area, because the money is going in but the outcomes are not coming out at the other end.

Norman Lamb: I agree, and I suspect that the social care system as a whole is under considerable strain. The Government have chosen to produce a Green Paper only on the older people element of social care. They are not looking at the position of younger adults with disability. The right hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that we are not seeing the outcomes that we absolutely need to see.

Importantly, the NAO focused on the proportion of people with learning disabilities who are in paid employment. We need to take a holistic view. This is not just about whether someone is in a hospital bed or in the community. We need to empower people, as far as possible, to live the kind of lives that the rest of us take for granted. The report highlights the fact that only 5.8% of people with a learning disability are in paid employment. However, some local authorities have up to 20% employment rates in that area, which shows what is possible. [Interruption.] Madam Deputy Speaker, I am moving towards the end of my speech. I heard a cough, and I note the point that you are trying to make.

Before I finish, however, I want to highlight the fact that there are good things going on. I want to ask the Minister a number of questions. Some areas of the country do this really well. They include Salford, Hertfordshire, Ealing and Bristol, and there is a brilliant community service in my own county of Norfolk, which is run by an immensely inspiring woman called Melanie Bruce. She previously worked in institutions, but now
takes the view that very few children ever need to go into hospital and that, if they do need to do so, it should be for only a very short time. The community service is called Starfish, and I have written to Simon Stevens saying that that model should be applied everywhere. In the past year, among the group of people in the Starfish programme, there has not been a single admission to hospital. That shows what is possible, rather than the doubling of the numbers that we are seeing elsewhere. I also want to mention Shared Lives Plus, a scheme in which someone with a learning disability or with mental ill health goes to live in a family. The families are paid for the support that they give, but the scheme treats the person as a human being and an equal citizen, rather than putting them in an institution. That is what is so important.

I will end by asking the Minister some questions. What will happen after March 2019? Will she commit to an improved successor programme that learns lessons from the last seven years and actually fulfils the promise of the transforming care programme, with a focus on implementation and inspiring effective national leadership?

Will she confirm that those other programmes in NHS England, which are vital for people with learning disability, will continue and that the same national focus will be maintained or indeed enhanced? What assurances can she give that this programme of work will continue as an absolute priority beyond March next year?

Given the slow progress to date on closing beds and the stated plan to close 922 beds by March, what evidence does the Minister have that new community support is available to support the safe discharge of those people? Can she guarantee that there will be a close focus on every single case, to avoid the risk of neglect? Will the Government establish a new workforce development fund to ensure that there are enough staff with the skills to deliver the right care in the community?

What actions will the Minister take to guarantee the pooling of money and the shift of resource from hospitals to the community? Will she address the conflict of interest of clinicians making decisions when they are employed by organisations that earn their money from keeping beds occupied? How will the Government ensure that all in-patients receive a care and treatment review every six months, instead of the failure of delivery that we have at the moment? What steps are the Government taking to improve data on in-patient numbers so that we can bring to an end the two unreconciled data sets that we still have, years on from when the NAO complained about this in the first place?

How will the Minister ensure that progress is robustly and independently monitored and scrutinised? When will the independent evaluation be published in full? How do the Government intend to learn from the areas of really good practice to deliver an approach based on early intervention and crisis prevention? Will she ensure that, from here on, children will be central to the Government’s programme? If we can prevent children from going into institutions in the first place, we can change their lives completely. We can rescue them from a life in an institution.

Finally, will the Minister discuss with the Prime Minister the case for a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce to drive progress and show that all parts of Government are doing their bit to meet people’s full range of needs, given the importance not only of where they are but of employment, housing, education and the criminal justice system? This is a story of the awful neglect of people’s human rights, and of people in this country here and now being treated as second-class citizens. This really does have to end, and we owe it to the families sitting in the Public Gallery today and their loved ones to do far better by them in the future.

2.39 pm

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Once again, I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing this debate, but I regret that more of our colleagues are not in the Chamber for what I consider to be a very important debate.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman and the House will forgive me if I come at this purely from the angle of autism, but, having the privilege of chairing the all-party group on autism, I tend to refer to it on every occasion, as many of my colleagues know. I have just come from a lunchtime event in the other place with the Baroness Browning, Angela Browning, who entered the House in the same year as I did and who was the original inspiration behind the Autism Act 2009, a private Member’s Bill that I took through the House. She was entertaining a group of people from an organisation called Fixers. I appreciate that we are not allowed prompts in the Chamber, but its report, “Feel Happy on the Spectrum: Young Autistic People Speak Out”, has already left an impression on me. Two very impressive young people, Jenny and Gabriel, talked us through their experiences.

As the right hon. Gentleman talked about employment, I had a look at the recommendations in the report, and of course they include something we would all like to see: more education on autism in the workplace. It contains testimony that I thought would be interesting to read into the record from a young person who has obviously found an employer who is understanding and welcoming of their autism. They wrote:

“Civil Service fast-stream is really good for people with autism. They go out of their way to accommodate your autism in their entrance exams with things like extra time and they don’t discriminate if you disclose.”

That is a positive note on which to start my remarks in a debate that is partly a reflection of the very sad and disturbing stories that came out of Winterbourne View care home. The transforming care programme was developed in response to that atrocious scandal. No one could have failed to be moved by the shocking abuse of adults with learning disabilities and autism in that private hospital, which was supposed to be an assessment and treatment unit—it most certainly was not a treatment unit; it was a maltreatment unit. Following that, the Government committed to moving about 3,000 adults with learning disabilities and autism out of in-patient settings and into community-based support by next April.

Although we have seen a small reduction in the number of people in in-patient settings, about 2,500 people are still in hospital, as the right hon. Gentleman said. Some 1% of those patients are under 18—that number has more than doubled since 2015; 61% have been in hospital for over two years and some, sadly, for over 10 years; and 46% have not had a care treatment review in the
past six months, as mandated. As he also told us, and as I also understand from an excellent organisation called Dimensions, which provides personalised social care services to people with learning disabilities and autism, more than 22% of people are placed more than 100 km from home. So although there has been a reduction in the number of people living in hospital and some real success in moving people into community support, too many people are still being admitted or readmitted to hospital, and there remain obstacles to moving some of the original cohort considered under the programme into real homes.

The success of the programme relies on the right support being available in the community to prevent people from being admitted in the first place or to help them move out of hospital. The number of autistic people recorded in in-patient units has increased by over a third in the three years since data collection began in March 2015. That is a phenomenal increase. According to the latest figures, almost 48% of people covered by the transforming care programme are in fact autistic. While some of this increase may be put down to better identification of autism, it still displays a concerning over-reliance on hospitals rather than homes. Put simply, if transforming care does not work for autistic people, I am afraid that it will not work. If the programme is to continue, all mental health staff will require better training on and understanding of autism and the right community support will have to be made available.

It is crucial that we hear from the Minister what plans there are beyond March 2019 to ensure that any progress made is not lost and that there is a focus on areas where better progress needs to be made, specifically in supporting autistic people.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am sorry I was not here earlier, but I was in a one-hour Westminster Hall debate. I commend the right hon. Lady for the hard work she does on autism across the United Kingdom. As she will know, Northern Ireland has an autism strategy that leads the United Kingdom. It is similar to the programme in Wales, but we are leading the way. Will she kindly suggest to the Minister that the Government look at the plan in Northern Ireland, along with the one in Wales, as a good way of proceeding?

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Yes, it is very important that we look at what arrangements the devolved countries make for people with autism. Certainly a few years ago, Wales was well in advance with its plans for autism, which I found most commendable, but I think it now needs to revisit and update its plans, because none of these plans must be left to one side; they need to be constantly reviewed and updated.

I am pleased that next year we will have the opportunity to conduct a 10-year review of the Autism Act. I hope the right hon. Gentleman will contribute to the work that many Members are doing on both sides of the House in various areas, from education to employment, healthcare and even the over-representation of people with autism in the criminal justice system, so that we can put down a marker for the Government after 10 years on what progress has been made and how much further we have to go. If the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) would be good enough to send me a link to the plans in Northern Ireland, or point me in the right direction, I am sure they will be taken into consideration as we carry out the review.

I am pleased to see the Minister in her place, as she obviously has a lead role, but I think that all relevant Departments need to play their part. I still have a feeling that we need a cross-departmental ministerial taskforce to cover the areas that I have just been highlighting, such as health, education, housing, and justice, all of which we will include in the APPG’s summary and presentation to the Government next year. Let me put down a marker for the Government. I want to know what plans the Minister has for the future of transforming care, whether she will establish that cross-departmental taskforce to lead the process, and what steps she will take to reduce the number of admissions of autistic people and improve the community services that should support them.

I work closely with many autism charities, and in particular with the National Autistic Society. Alongside Mencap and the Challenging Behaviour Foundation, it has been leading research on the experience of families who have been affected by the transforming care programme. It wanted to look into exactly how relatives came to be in mental health hospitals, and what was getting in the way of their being discharged back into the community. I commend to the Minister the report “Transforming Care: our stories”. It contains the very powerful stories of 13 families, and I think that she will find it very useful, if she or her officials have not yet been able to read it.

The report found that, despite the existence of a national programme, five areas needed real focus to make the programme successful. The first is “Making sure the right services are available in the community”. I think we have covered that. The second is involving and listening to individual families, and helping them to be heard through advocacy if necessary. The third is improving the quality of in-patient care. The fourth is “Making plans for discharge and sticking to them”. The fifth is providing specialist support from trained and understanding staff. For me, that last one is key. When we have met someone with autism, we have met just one person with autism. Everyone is different. Staff really need to understand that, and to be trained to understand people with autism.

Sandy Martin: Does the right hon. Lady agree that one of the most important aspects of support for the families of children and young people with autism is the availability of respite care, to enable them to cope with the very great additional duties that they have?

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Absolutely. I know from my constituency casework—as, I think, will every MP—that providing a safe home and a safe environment for a family member who has autism can be a very intense, demanding and challenging process, and respite care plays an important part in giving family members a breathing space.

The report includes some remarks from someone called Anna, the mother of Catherine, who is autistic and has a learning disability and obsessive-compulsive disorder.

“Anna told us, ‘she’s not getting any treatment, it’s just a holding pen because staff [in the unit] don’t have the right skills, expertise or mindset...Everything is about seclusion, never about trying to prevent incidents happening in the first place.’”

That demonstrates to me that there is a lack of training, and that much more emphasis should be put on that.
The report goes on to outline recommendations made from people and organisations at every level, from individual professionals to NHS England and the Government. In particular, it suggests that a cultural shift is needed to ensure that individuals and their families are listened to in a way that can reduce the number of adversarial relationships that sometimes arise. The importance of a good understanding of both autism and learning disabilities, as a comorbidity, should be emphasised more than it is at present.

One of the parents of an autistic man with mental health problems said:

"Stephen just falls between the gaps and no one takes ultimate responsibility for his case... Where is the pressure to get Stephen back into the community?"

That is a cry for help from a father who wants to see his son go out into the community and have the quality of life that everyone deserves to be able to achieve.

The report also highlights a lack of accountability throughout the system, particularly when it comes to meeting the needs of autistic people. At a national level, in NHS England, leadership for autism falls into the gap between established learning disability and mental health teams. The appointment of a new strategy lead for autism in NHS England is considered to be a very positive step, but I need to be reassured that, in the future, NHS England will focus on the needs of autistic people in order to meet the Government’s requirement for a reduction in their health inequality, which is a commitment in the NHS mandate. I hope that the Minister will tell us what steps she will take to ensure that NHS England allocates appropriate resources to the needs of autistic people, and to ensure that the issues set out in “Transforming Care: our stories”—I am going to give her a copy—are addressed.

Autism charities regularly hear that autistic people struggle to find mental health support that meets their needs, and in the worst cases, if this is not available, people hit crisis and are admitted to hospital. Traditional mental health interventions might need changing, for example by using clear, non-metaphorical language or communicating with someone who does not speak. That, again, requires a good understanding of autism.

In 2016 NHS England published its mental health “Five Year Forward View” outlining how it plans to improve mental health services in England. It includes a number of proposals for new care pathways to help people access the right support and, importantly, it proposes a care pathway for autism. Work on designing this pathway is due to start this year, but I have not seen any detail on what it will include. It is vital that it covers the following for children, young people and adults on the autism spectrum: timely access to autism diagnosis, autism training for all mental health staff, and the ability to make reasonable adjustments for mental health treatments so that if autistic people need mental health support, they can get the right help from services. I hope that the Minister will also address how the autism care pathway will be developed and that it will cover diagnosis, access to tailored mental health support and autism training.

Another contributory factor to the number of autistic people in mental health hospitals is the inclusion of autism in the Mental Health Act 1983 definition of mental disorder, meaning that autistic people can be sectioned without a diagnosed mental health problem. The independent review of the Mental Health Act is very important and has been welcomed by the autism charities. They believe it is important to create a legal regime around mental health support that properly meets the needs of autistic people and their families. The status quo fails to do this, and that has resulted in autistic people being inappropriately detained under the Act and far too often subjected to damaging over-medication. The NHS digital data show that autistic people are not benefiting entirely from the NHS England transforming care programme, because the in-patient numbers are failing to meaningfully reduce and in some cases are rising. The review’s interim report has identified this definition of autism as a mental disorder as a key question to be addressed in the final report, and I strongly urge that the review must address the inequality for autistic people at the heart of the Mental Health Act. I hope the Minister addresses that in her closing remarks.

I have spoken for some time, and I hope I have added to the debate initiated by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, although I appreciate that I have, inevitably, repeated some of the points he made. In conclusion, I go back to something I said earlier about the transforming care programme that I think summarises the situation. Put simply, if transforming care does not work for autistic people, it will not work. We want transforming care to work; we want it to succeed. It has made a start: it is not an all-good start, but it is not an all-bad start. The Minister and the Government have a golden opportunity to turn what is a visionary programme into something that can reflect the success of the care with which we look after people in our community with learning disabilities and autism. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

2.58 pm

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for the debate and to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing it. I am also grateful for his commitment to this issue over many years. It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan). I am grateful, too, for her deep commitment to, and knowledge of, the subject of autism.

The treatment of residents at Winterbourne View was a national disgrace. That any human being should be subjected to such terrifying physical and emotional abuse in their own home setting is utterly abhorrent, and that those people should be among the most vulnerable and least able to speak out or defend themselves simply defies belief. The way in which we treat our most vulnerable residents is a mark of our civilisation, and Winterbourne View was a failure of the most basic measure of human decency. It was therefore absolutely right that the public outcry that followed Winterbourne View led to a firm commitment from the Government and to the transforming care programme.

However, the transforming care programme has failed to live up to its name. It has not substantially transformed the care and support that many people with autism and/or a learning disability are receiving. There are still far too many people living in hospitals such as
Winterbourne View instead of homes. There are still far too many examples of families who have to fight each week to ensure their relatives’ safety and security, and even the basics of care, and too many people are still not receiving the support they need to live healthy, secure and fulfilled lives. We are now eight months away from the end of the transforming care programme and urgent action is needed to deliver a genuine transformation in the quality of care for thousands of people living with learning disability and autism in the UK.

In December 2012, 3,400 people were in NHS-funded learning disability in-patient beds, with around 1,200 in assessment and treatment units. The original Department of Health report following Winterbourne View found that the main reason for referral was the management of a crisis, suggesting that the failure in service provision had often started long before the person was admitted to hospital. The failure often involved a lack of support in other areas of health, social care and education provision, often leading to behavioural and mental health deteriorating over time and then reaching a crisis point. The report’s conclusion suggested six key changes, and I want to restate them because, in the experience of too many of my constituents, those changes have not yet been implemented or become a reality.

The first recommendation was that the information made available by councils, health bodies and care providers should be transparent and of good quality. The second was that community-based mental health services should offer assertive outreach, 24-hour crisis resolution and general support. The third recommendation was that small-scale residential care should be available to those in greatest need. The fourth was that employment or daytime activities should be offered. The fifth was that health and social care commissioners should start to plan from day one of admission to in-patient services for the move back to the community. The final recommendation was that the Care Quality Commission should monitor whether services are meeting essential standards, take enforcement action if a provider is not compliant, and monitor the operation of the Mental Health Act 1983.

Those recommendations bring me to the case of my constituent Matthew Garnett. Matthew’s mother Isabelle is in the Public Gallery today, and I am grateful to the Minister for taking the time to meet me and Isabelle recently. I have spoken of Matthew’s situation in the Chamber several times, but I make no apologies for raising it again today because his case illustrates exactly how little progress has been made in implementing the Department of Health’s original recommendations in response to Winterbourne View.

Matthew is approaching his 18th birthday. He is a tall young man whose absolute passion is football, particularly Liverpool FC. Matthew has autism. I first met Matthew’s mum at the start of 2016 when she came to my surgery following a deterioration in Matthew’s mental health and behaviour at home. Matthew had been admitted to a mental health unit under section. At that time, Matthew’s parents were concerned that the assessment unit that he was in had no specialism in autism and that he had been there for far too long without appropriate clinical support. They had been recommended a hospital in Northampton, St Andrew’s, as a place with the right expertise for Matthew to be able to get well and come home.

I supported their battle to get access to a bed for Matthew at St Andrew’s, and we celebrated when he was allocated a bed.

After Matthew had been at St Andrew’s for just a few weeks, his parents came to see me again. They were concerned that Matthew seemed to be taking part in very few activities, that he was losing weight, that he had become more withdrawn and that they had noticed signs of anxiety in his behaviour. They were concerned that there was no discharge plan and that staff seemed reluctant even to talk about one. Matthew’s situation deteriorated rapidly at St Andrew’s. He suffered a broken wrist and bruising. His parents found excrement in his shoes. He lost a catastrophic amount of weight. His parents became gravely concerned that he would die, so we fought again. They found alternative community-based provision not far from the hospital. They contacted Alderwood, which the right hon. Member for North Norfolk has already mentioned, and discovered that it had a place for Matthew, so he moved in.

Matthew is now flourishing. He volunteers at the local football club and in the village where his home is located. He takes part in a wide range of activities—from film nights to canoeing and trips to the seaside—and he is able to play and watch lots of football. Matthew is well and living life to the full. The care and support he is receiving costs considerably less than the £12,000 a week spent by the NHS on a private hospital bed in which his health was deteriorating and from which there was no plan to discharge him.

Norman Lamb: The hon. Lady is making a powerful case. Does she agree that the Care Quality Commission should do far more to challenge how these units often define themselves as specialist units? The care given to Matthew and Fouzia at St Andrew’s in Northampton was very far from specialist; it was inappropriate and it damaged them massively.

Helen Hayes: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I also visited St Andrew’s and, when I returned, I looked at how it was advertising its services and compared that with what I saw. I would go so far as to say that, in any consumer environment, a good case could be made that St Andrew’s was contravening the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 in how it was advertising itself, given the expertise the staff actually had in relation to autism. In my view, that is certainly a matter for the CQC.

Matthew’s case is important, because it demonstrates clearly that all the failures that led to Winterbourne View are still possible. Matthew’s family did not receive the support they needed for Matthew at any stage prior to his admission to hospital. It was that lack of support that led to his behaviour deteriorating in the first place. There was no assertive outreach or 24-hour crisis resolution support; there was just the local police force when things got too much. That was four years after the Department of Health report on Winterbourne View.

The small-scale residential setting in which Matthew is now living is brilliant, but there is far too little of that type of provision and none of it close to home. Matthew’s parents live in my south London constituency, and Matthew is currently living in Northamptonshire. I met the providers of his care at Alderwood, and they told me that what they provide is easily scalable. It is about
training staff in effective communication techniques, paying staff properly and providing a good career structure so that providers can retain a stable team, and being able to access funding for the places they provide. It is not rocket science. It just needs a proper commitment to invest in settings that deliver the best possible care.

At St Andrew’s, Matthew was not participating in any meaningful activities on a day-to-day basis; the emphasis was on managing and containing his behaviour through medication rather than engaging him in recovery. In his new home at Alderwood, Matthew is on very low levels of medication. He takes part in meaningful activities that add value to his life and make a real contribution to his community on a daily basis.

There was no discharge planning while Matthew was at St Andrew’s. In fact, his parents were told they were being far too optimistic even to raise discharge with his clinicians. St Andrew’s is a private hospital that is largely funded by the NHS. The Government must look seriously and urgently at the perverse incentives at work in a system that is so reliant on the private sector because of the lack of NHS provision. Private hospitals currently have no incentive to discharge when they are being paid a rate of £12,000 a week by the NHS.

There was very little scrutiny of the effectiveness of the treatment Matthew was receiving in return for such large amounts of NHS funding, and no regard was given to the concerns of his family, who had to fight to get a second opinion, which was itself dismissed by staff at St Andrew’s.

Transforming care can never be fully implemented while such perverse incentives apply and while profit-making organisations are relied on to substitute for a lack of proper funding for NHS and social care provision. Private hospitals too often remain holding pens for patients, rather than the secure and supported homes that they need. No learning disabled or autistic person should be living in a hospital for the long term. We need homes not hospitals.

Too many of my constituents whose family members, including children, have a learning disability and/or autism still tell me that when they express concerns about the care their loved one is receiving, their views are not taken seriously and they have to battle to have their concerns addressed. Again, we cannot begin to see a system that delivers the care that vulnerable people need without proper processes for accountability through which family members can raise concerns.

I am concerned about the Government’s tracking of the progress of the implementation of transforming care. In response to a written question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), the Minister for Care highlighted, in her answer on 4 June, the plan to decommission 900 beds in mental health hospitals. Assuring transformation data provides figures on the number of people with learning disabilities and/or autism admitted and discharged. In the 2017-18 period, there were 330 more discharges than admissions, but it should be noted that this applies not to individual people, but to the individual instance of an admission or discharge, so there is no way to tell to what extent some people are caught in a revolving door. The dataset does not directly identify whether an admission is from the community or a transfer from another hospital setting. Similarly, the data does not directly identify whether the end of an episode of care is a discharge to the community or a transfer to another hospital setting. Thus, although 330 discharges might sound like progress, the Department of Health and Social Care has not so far provided figures for individual cases. In the light of the target of closing 900 beds, this cannot be seen in any way as a victory for either the Government or, more importantly, those vulnerable individuals whom transforming care is intended to safeguard.

I am also concerned that the Government’s focus for the final few months of transforming care is far too much on hospital bed closures. Bed closures should be a consequence of the provision of properly funded, high-quality community settings, and the by-product of achieving better outcomes for people currently in long-term hospital provision. Instead, the Government continually refer to bed closures as the headline target and measure for transforming care. Without high-quality, properly resourced alternative provision, bed closures, in themselves, will simply result in further pressures on the NHS, as people who are discharged without sufficient support will end up readmitted, via A&E, to a situation where fewer in-patient beds are available. It is almost impossible to find any meaningful data on the funding and level of community provision for people with autism and learning disabilities, and I urge the Government to switch their focus from bed closures to community provision for the final eight months of transforming care in its current form.

I also want to highlight the regulatory gap that still exists. A constituent contacted me recently on behalf of her brother, who is an adult with autism living in a supported housing provision, paid for through his personal budget. He needs a high level of support and his personal budget is considerable, but his sister has raised concerns about his treatment in the community provision over a period of months. The provision involves a high level of care, but is technically supported housing, which means that it is not regulated by the CQC. The recent report by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee and the Work and Pensions Committee on supported housing highlighted this gap in regulation and called on the Government to take action to address it, and I want to do so again today. There is great urgency that we make progress on transforming care, but discharging vulnerable people from hospital into settings that are not regulated creates a risk that they will be failed yet again.

Finally, I wish to highlight the wider gap in awareness and support, particularly in the area of autism. In schools and in the NHS, the experience of far too many of my constituents is that the support needed so that autistic people, particularly children, are able to thrive is simply not there. This continued failure to properly equip teachers and healthcare professionals to understand autism and the support that their students and patients need has long-term consequences through an increased level of care that people need later in life and an increased likelihood of crisis. I urge the Minister to work with her colleagues, particularly those in the Department for Education, to accelerate and bring forward training in autism for teachers, and not just new teachers coming through the education system now.
but existing teachers who are working day in, day out, without the knowledge that they need to serve autistic students well.

There is no way around the fact that the transforming care programme has failed significantly to date. We need a renewed focus on care and support for people with learning disabilities and autism. In every community throughout the country they should be living well, close to family and friends and properly supported, not locked away receiving over-medicalised care, with no one monitoring how effective that care is or what the public purse receives by way of high-quality provision in return for the expenditure. We need homes not hospitals, and we need everybody living with autism and a learning disability in this country to be able to live life to the full, with dignity, in community settings that are close to home.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I call Ronnie Cowan.

3.15 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker; it was like Hobson’s choice there, but I eventually got to my feet.

I thank the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing this important debate. I echo the sentiments of the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) about there being lamentably few Members present to take part; it makes my job of summarising the debate a lot easier, but I am sure that all 650 MPs have constituency cases relating to the issues we are discussing.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk correctly pointed out in his opening remarks that the input from charitable organisations in the sector is absolutely paramount. Where would we be without the organisations that turn out in numbers to raise money for and give help and support to people in care throughout our society? Their commitment and support of the caring community is quite extraordinary. He also brought a humane touch to the debate, detailing some distressing individual cases, and highlighted the risk that individuals can be trapped in the very system that is supposed to be there to aid them.

The right hon. Gentleman also encouraged whistle-blowers, saying that they should be listened to and not shut down. He offered strong support for the nine blowers, saying that they should be listened to and not lauded at any point and decide that we have this matter in the bag and review our strategy; we cannot sit back on our laurels at any point and decide that we have this matter under control. It is about learning and re-learning as we go forward.

The Keys to Life, published in 2013, is a 10-year strategy, with a focus on health issues, to improve the quality of life for people with learning disabilities. With £7.7 million of investment, we are improving learning disability services in Scotland. The strategy’s implementation plan sets out four strategic outcomes: a healthy life; choice and control; independence; and active citizenship. The delivery of the strategy is being taken forward with a wide range of partners in the statutory and third sectors, and is focused on phased priorities targeted at each of the four outcomes. The Scottish Government have been working since 2017 on reviewing progress and identifying priorities for the next phase of implementation. Reducing the stark health inequalities that people with learning disabilities face is a key priority within the strategy. Without good health, people with learning disabilities are unable to contribute to, or participate in, their communities.

Ultimately, sometimes these things do come down to money. There will never be a time when we look at the healthcare that we are provided with and say, “Well, that’s good enough.” We always want better for our friends, our family and our loved ones. The Scottish Government are committed to the twin approach of investment and reform in our national health and care services. In 2018-19, the health resource budget will increase by more than £400 million to £13.1 billion—£360 million more than the inflation-only increases since 2016-17. By the end of the current Holyrood term, we will have increased the health resource budget by £2 billion.
I have grave concern with regard to the people providing these services. Although we all seek to improve care across our communities, Brexit and the UK Government’s hesitation in guaranteeing EU national rights for those in the UK means that we face a massive threat to the NHS workforce. As a result, we face losing valued and respected workers in the care sector and beyond. The free movement of people and the mutual recognition of qualifications allow skilled and experienced health professionals from the EU and the European economic area to work in our NHS. Without that, our ability to continue to provide high-quality health and social care services for the people of Scotland will suffer, particularly for the people in Scotland’s remote and rural communities, and that will be echoed throughout the United Kingdom.

I always take great pleasure in engaging in the local carers’ week in my community. It has happened in the past three years that I have been an MP. It is a learning process. Attending such events means that we can meet some of the best people in our communities. I learn from them on an ongoing basis, and I look forward to doing so. I ask this Government to take a serious process. Attending such events means that we can meet some of the best people in our communities. I learn from them on an ongoing basis, and I look forward to doing so. I ask this Government to take a serious

3.21 pm

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Let me start by congratulating and thanking the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) for securing this debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting the time on this very important issue. As the motion today notes, the transforming care programme was created with the stated intention of improving quality of care and quality of life for children and adults with a learning disability or autism who display challenging behaviours.

As we have heard from Members today, people with learning disabilities too often suffer from neglect, abuse, poor care and even premature death. Unfortunately, as the right hon. Gentleman set out, the transforming care programme is not delivering the promised improvements in their lives. Instead, too many are wrongly admitted to assessment and treatment units, in which they remain trapped, rather than living independently where they can be with their families and friends and, of course, the support network that comes with them. The community services that should be part of that support network are themselves underfunded and simply do not have the capacity that is needed. As it stands, the transforming care programme is unlikely even to come close to the ambitions rightly set out in the “Building the Right Support” strategy by March 2019, when it is due to conclude. Let us take, for example, the target to decommission 900 learning disability beds in conventional hospitals. The Minister admitted just this week, in an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Worsley and Eccles South (Barbara Keeley), that the Government have not even come close to meeting the halfway point to that target.

Seven years after Winterbourne View and more than two years on from the start of “Building the Right Support” strategy, there has been a startling lack of progress in key areas. There has been little reduction in the number of people in in-patient units and in the number of admissions. Indeed, the most recent data, from May 2018, shows that there are 2,400 people with a learning disability and/or autism in in-patient units, which is an increase since the last monthly data was released. It should be of great concern that the number of children in in-patient units has also increased. The latest NHS Digital data shows there are 250 children in these units, more than double the number of children—110—who were reported as being in in-patient units in March 2015. There are 465 young people aged between 18 and 24 in in-patient units, and this age group makes up a significant proportion of the whole transforming care in-patient cohort. This data suggests that the transition from child to adult services is the point at which people with learning disabilities are particularly at risk of admission, as Dame Christine Lenehan pointed out in her review last year.

As we have already heard this afternoon, the average length of stay in in-patient units has stayed largely the same, at approximately 5.4 years. Similarly, in answers to my hon. Friend Ministers have admitted that discharges into the community actually went down in the last year, and quite significantly so for those with learning disabilities. It is clear that transforming care is not delivering the promised outcomes at this time. Unfortunately, this failure fits the wider picture of neglect for people with learning disabilities and the services on which they rely.

The recent learning disabilities mortality review came seven years after Winterbourne View and nearly three years since the death of Connor Sparrowhawk, which in part prompted it. Its findings show the scant regard with which people with learning disabilities are treated.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): The fact that the risk of people with learning disabilities dying before the age of 50 is 58 times higher than the rest of the population is scandalous in itself.

Paula Sherriff: My hon. Friend makes a very valid point. Everybody here this afternoon could not fail to be shocked and horrified by the case outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) regarding her young constituent, Matthew, and the quality of care that he received on an in-patient unit.

Some 1,311 cases were passed for review between July 2016 and November 2017, but only 103—that is 8%—have finished so far. The report cited a lack of local capacity to review cases, inadequate training for people completing mortality reviews and insufficient staff capacity to complete a mortality review. Will the Minister update the House on when the remaining cases will be finalised and what the Department is doing to ensure that these barriers are tackled? In 13% of cases reviewed, the person’s health had been adversely affected by delays in care or treatment, gaps in service provision, organisational dysfunction, neglect or abuse.

Just how many more deaths must occur before the Government tackle the unjust treatment of people with learning disabilities? Dr Ryan, Connor Sparrowhawk’s mother, was also damning in her assessment. She said that too many agencies had shown “systematic disregard” for some people with learning disabilities and she felt that certain people “simply don’t count” in the eyes of
the authorities. We must do better, and we must show that every single life matters. But our fear is that, without some fundamental changes in the Government’s approach, the problem is set to get worse, not better.

Take the NHS workforce, for example. The latest figures from Health Education England show that the number of learning disability nurses working in the NHS has gone down by a third over five years. HEE data from March 2017 shows that learning disability nursing had the highest proportion of vacancies, at 16.3%, compared with all other fields of nursing. Will the Minister tell us how the Government plan to tackle this?

It is bad enough that the failures of transforming care have left too many people inappropriately in hospital settings, but the lack of trained staff when they are there makes that failure all the more stark.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I am with the hon. Lady in her criticisms, and in wanting some constructive developments and improvements, but I would not want her to stay at the Dispatch Box and paint a picture that is completely negative. There are some inspirational stories about people coming out of these settings and institutions after being dealt with by a caring team, who have put a particular emphasis on communications and turned lives around. Some of the case studies published by Dimensions show that that really is one of the ways forward, and that is what we should seek. It is possible to take an aggressive individual out of an in-patient setting and give them the quality of life and meaning to life that we would all want and expect.

Paula Sherriff: I thank the right hon. Lady for her intervention. I absolutely agree. There are some incredible examples around the country of excellent work that is being done, but that makes it all the more important that we share that good practice so that it is disseminated more widely. Particularly on this very special day of the NHS’s 70th anniversary, I pay tribute to all those people who are involved in being innovative, and not just doing exactly what they have to and no more.

It is bad enough that the failure of transforming care has left too many people inappropriately in hospital settings, but the lack of trained staff when they are there makes that failure all the more stark. It is also a matter of great concern that the Government are not including people with learning disabilities, or working-age people with disabilities, in the social care Green Paper, but are instead having a “parallel workstream”. Once again, the care needs of people with learning disabilities seem to have been put in second place.

If this catalogue of failure were not enough, the issue around sleep-ins threatens to make it even worse. It has been woefully mishandled thus far. Having admitted that earlier guidance on pay was misleading both for providers and commissioners, Ministers are now playing for time rather than finding a solution, ignoring warnings from care providers, charities, and the Local Government Association. The consequences for people with learning disabilities and autism could be disastrous. Some 70% of learning disability providers have warned that they will no longer be viable. It could drastically reduce the number of providers available to provide community services. For people with learning disabilities, autism or challenging behaviour who are personal budget-holders in receipt of funding from local authorities to pay care staff themselves, this crisis could lead to difficulty in paying their personal back-pay bill and, in turn, having to reduce their level of support to cover costs.

Let me be clear, as a former healthcare worker and trade unionist, that the care workers affected should receive historic back pay for national minimum wage sleep-in shifts rather than paying the price for underfunding of social care. Given the state of the sector, without imminent investment we run the risk of a systemic failure that could leave thousands of people without the care that they desperately need. That is why we continue to call for the Government to reveal the full scale of financial liability and to increase funding for social care so that care providers can continue to deliver services to vulnerable people in need of care and workers can receive the pay to which they are entitled.

A Labour Government would provide care workers with paid travel time, access to training, and an option to choose regular hours. That, of course, comes in the context of proper investment, increasing social care budgets by £8 billion over the next Parliament, including an additional £1 billion for the first year to ease the Tory social care crisis. We have made our alternative crystal clear. Our policy will include all people with care needs, with the aim of ensuring that they can live independently and, most crucially, with dignity.

The question that the Minister must now answer is whether and how this Government can work towards that goal. Will there be a successor programme to transforming care? How will the shift to early intervention, prevention and community care be prioritised and properly resourced, given that what we have now is clearly not sufficient? In the end, this is a question of how we value human lives.

3.32 pm

The Minister for Care (Caroline Dinenage): I congratulate the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) on securing this really important debate. I thank him for his continuing hard work and commitment, both within this place and outside, in championing the interests of people with a learning disability. As a Minister in the coalition, he was a driving force on this issue, particularly following the Winterbourne View scandal.

On a personal note, I also thank the right hon. Gentleman for the work that he did in commissioning an investigation into the tragedies at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. As a Health Minister, I have had to recuse myself from speaking about that because I am also the local Member of Parliament, but I want to put on record my gratitude to him for the work that he did. In many ways, there are parallels with what we are talking about today: families whose voices have not been heard; families who do not necessarily feel that they have been listened to. We all have to look at how we can learn the lessons from cases like Winterbourne View and how we stop other families suffering in the same way.

I thank other Members from across the House for participating in the debate. I am so sorry that there are not more of them, because this is a really important issue. I have met many of the Members here today to discuss their concerns. I will always be available to do that at another point if they would wish me to do so.

They have asked me lots of questions. I will do my best to answer as many of them as I can in the time that you have permitted me, Madam Deputy Speaker. If I fail to do that, I will write to the Members concerned.
Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): For the sake of clarity, I should say to the Minister that I cannot limit her time, nor would I try to. In the current circumstances, she actually has an enormous amount of time, but I know that she will not try the patience of the House. I agree with her that a great many important questions have been raised, and I am sure she will wish, assiduously as ever, to answer them all. I will not interfere with the time that it takes her to do so.

Caroline Dinenage: That truly is good news, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will try not to go on, as my husband tells me I have a propensity to do. I will answer as many questions as I can. I may have misinterpreted some of them, and I may not be able to read the copious notes I have written, but I will write to Members if I do not get to their points.

We can all agree that people with a learning disability and/or autism have the right to the same opportunities as everyone else to live satisfying and valued lives and to be treated with dignity and respect; that goes for their families, too. As good and as necessary as in-patient care can be—we have heard examples of how it has changed people's lives—we know that people with a learning disability should have the opportunity to live at home, to develop and maintain relationships and to get the support they need to live healthy, safe and rewarding lives in their own local communities.

The mandate to NHS England—the list of “must dos” for the NHS—set by the Government every year includes the following clear objective:

“We expect NHS England to strive to reduce the health gap between people with mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism and the population as a whole, and support them to live full, healthy and independent lives.”

The transforming care programme is at the heart of that commitment. It is a partnership across local government and the NHS to transform the care, support and treatment available to enable people with a learning disability, autism or both to lead the lives of their choosing with and in their local community.

Through the national transformation plan, “Building the Right Support”, we have an ambitious and comprehensive plan to bring councils and clinical commissioning groups together in transforming care partnerships to plan and provide services across their areas; to use funding in new ways, including through pooling budgets, which I will talk about in a moment; and to ensure that people and their families have a clear idea of what they should expect from those agencies through the national service model. Key to all that has been building the right support in the community so that people do not need to go to hospital in the first place and those who are already there can move out.

Members have raised concerns today about the progress made under the transforming care programme. I can reassure them that progress continues to be made, but I will commit to take forward most seriously all the concerns raised today. The number of in-patients continues to decrease, and it is down to 2,400. NHS England has been clear that it is fully committed to meeting the ambition to reduce the number of in-patients by at least 35% by next March. It has talked about the intention to close around 900 learning disability beds. I entirely take the point made by the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) that focusing on the number of beds misses the point, and that it must be about ensuring that community provision and support are available to enable people to make that move, rather than the fact that beds are closing.

Norman Lamb: I appreciate the Minister being willing to write to us after the debate with anything she is not able to cover. Does she understand the concern that a headlong rush to meet the target because we are getting close to the deadline without proper arrangements in place could be disastrous for individuals? If the target is not achieved, that is better than a complete failure, with readmissions after failed discharges. The focus on detail in every case is critical.

Caroline Dinenage: I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman. I do not want to have concerns about safe discharge, and that is why we look at that in care and treatment reviews. More than 7,000 of those reviews have been carried out, to reduce the time that people stay in hospital and improve the quality of care they receive while in hospital. Essentially, they are a step towards ensuring that community provision is available before people are allowed to leave hospital. The latest data show that the proportion of in-patients reported as never having had a care and treatment review was 8%, down from 47% in January 2016.

Norman Lamb: It should be 0%.

Caroline Dinenage: Absolutely, it should be 0%. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, that is what we are working towards.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I appreciate that this is quite a complex area, but I have looked at some of the transition times. Dimensions—I mentioned it earlier—has estimated that its average transition time per patient is 12.5 months, which I believe is below the usual transition time. Does the Minister feel that this length of time will inhibit her from reaching her targets in 2019? Is there anything we can do to reduce the time, or does that length of time need to be taken?

Caroline Dinenage: My right hon. Friend makes an excellent point. NHS England says it is confident of hitting these targets and it will be doing all it can to ensure that that happens, but that must not be at the cost of treating people with the right levels of care or of having the right provision in place. This is also about keeping people out of the hospital setting in the first place.

The number of people receiving community or pre-admission care, education and treatment reviews also continues to improve, with 42% more undertaken in 2017-18 than in the previous year, of which 79% led to a decision not to admit somebody to in-patient care.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I do not know whether the Minister will accept this, but I would have thought that everybody involved in this debate actually preferred us not to aim for a target that might not be reachable, because it is the quality of the outcomes and successful transitions that we are looking for. Will she be flexible enough to say, on looking at this again, that if we cannot achieve the targets by 2019, she will allow the timeframe to drop out of the picture? It is more important to have a successful transition, with the right length of time for somebody to transition, than to hit what might be an unattainable target.
Caroline Dinenage: I agree with my right hon. Friend that there is absolutely no point in having arbitrary targets that do not actually deliver the quality we are aiming for. As we all know from political history, targets for the sake of it have not always necessarily worked out in the way intended.

It is worth emphasising that this is a really special programme for people with very complex needs who require a very particular type of support. They also need to have their care reviewed and to have a bespoke package put in place, tailored to their needs, to allow them to live in the community. There is no one single intervention and no template for what care is needed because every person is different.

Norman Lamb: Will the Minister give way?

Caroline Dinenage: If I may make a little progress, I will definitely answer the right hon. Gentleman’s questions a bit later.

Care must be personalised, and it must be enduring. This can never be a case of rolling out a particular model of care across the country or seen as kicking off some kind of universal service.

To further accelerate discharge and the community service necessary to provide it, NHS England has transferred £50 million to clinical commissioning groups that are closing hospital beds so that they can invest in community alternatives. In addition, between 2015 and the end of the programme, NHS England will have invested over £50 million in transformation funding to support transforming care partnerships in putting in place the critical components of community support. This support includes community forensic teams, crisis prevention teams and teams focused on supporting children in the community.

Additionally, the Department of Health and Social Care has provided capital grants of over £23 million, which has been spent on housing to support people to return to live in the community or to prevent an admission to hospital. NHS England has a pipeline of further investments that it plans to deliver over the next year to support housing projects, to accelerate bed decommissioning and discharges and, most specifically and importantly, to develop community teams.

Members have expressed concern that once the transforming care programme ends in March 2019, action to support those with a learning disability and the most complex needs will also end, but I stress emphatically that that is not the case. NHS organisations and local authorities have come together to build on existing practice, and they have engaged with families and organisations to develop innovative plans to suit their areas. That must not stop. We are closing those beds permanently, and ensuring good-quality community provision is more important than ever. We should be crystal clear that the principles of building the right support will endure beyond March 2019. The philosophy is to change the way that we support people with learning disabilities for good.

Norman Lamb rose—

Caroline Dinenage: Perhaps I can make a bit of progress and then I will come back to the right hon. Gentleman. We are not moving people from a hospital, where their outcomes are poor, into the community, just for them to be replaced in hospital by others. The transformation must be permanent, and we must consider what central support local areas need to ensure that that happens.

Hon. Members have been tempting me to talk about what will happen beyond March 2019, and to give a commitment on how the future of transforming care will look beyond that point. All delivery partners share a commitment to support the progress made by local partnerships to transform the choices available for local people, and to ensure that they are supported to lead fuller and more independent lives in their local communities. Plans are currently under way, and we will provide hon. Members with further updates once they have been finalised.

Transforming care is not the only area in which we seek to support those with a learning disability, and we are driving work to improve health and care outcomes across the board. It is an uncomfortable truth that mortality rates for people with a learning disability can be a measure of how well their care needs are being met. Following the publication of the report “Confidential Inquiry into premature deaths of people with learning disabilities” in 2013, we know that those with a learning disability die much earlier than those without, and too often for completely avoidable reasons. That is unforgivable.

In order to tackle that issue, in 2015 we established the learning disabilities mortality review programme, which requires consistent, local scrutiny across England into the deaths of anyone with a learning disability, so that action can be taken based on those findings. Like me, hon. Members will have been deeply concerned by the recent report from the University of Bristol, which leads that programme. The report highlights the persistence of inequalities faced by people with learning disabilities in their health and care. People with learning disabilities are still dying prematurely, and I was particularly alarmed and distressed to note that neglect, abuse, delays in treatment, and gaps in service provision played a part in one in eight of the deaths reviewed, which is unacceptable.

The situation described in the report must change, and the Government will soon respond to its national recommendations in full. I am pleased, however, that we are not waiting for that publication to ensure that action is taken, and significant remedial actions are already under way.

I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that as well as implementation we must embed change and ensure that we never revert back—that is key and something I am determined to focus on. We need a relentless focus on improvement, and I am convinced that training is a key part of that. Local commissioners must use that learning and take appropriate remedial action in their own areas.

The NHS improvement learning disability standards published in June specify that an NHS trust should measure the service it provides against clearly defined standards, so as to identify improvements. We will collect information on every trust centrally, to monitor how well the needs of people with learning disabilities are being met.

Hon. Members mentioned workforce and training, and on 9 May we announced a £10 million fund for incentives for postgraduate students to go on to work in the fields of mental health and learning disabilities, as well as for those who go on to work in community nursing roles. We are considering the most effective way
to implement an incentive scheme. Our response to the LeDeR report will address its clear recommendations on workforce training.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about how we improve data. Clearly, with monthly data published on progress we are aiming for transparency. NHS Digital is working with the transforming care partnerships to make sure that we have high-quality data. The aim is for the mental health services dataset to be the main dataset in the future.

I was pleased that Members spoke with positivity about some of the outcomes for their constituents, albeit in some cases way too late. I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) for talking about some of the transformational results of the work so far. We clearly need to see more of it. The right hon. Member for North Norfolk talked about what an incredible difference the Shared Lives scheme can make. My self-appointed best friend, an adult from my constituency with learning disabilities who sadly passed away last year, lived in a Shared Lives home. I saw what an incredible relationship she had with the family she lived with.

Norman Lamb: I am very grateful to the Minister for giving way. On that specific point, she will probably be aware that the development of Shared Lives is quite variable around the country. There are some regions where it has developed quite well and other regions where there is virtually nothing. The Government could give more resource to expand the programme, because that is the way that we really change lives, getting people out of institutions and giving them a fulfilling life.

Caroline Dinenage: I am very glad the right hon. Gentleman said that because as part of the Department of Health and Social Care legacy scheme we are providing £70,000 in this year for that sort of intermediate and reablement provision which Share Lives would come under. We should definitely be investing more in that.

I take very seriously the right hon. Gentleman’s point on conflicts of interest. We have to look at that very carefully, because it might imply that any clinician would be conflicted in making a clinical decision because they are employed by a trust. Providers are monitored by the CQC and doctors are of course subject to extremely rigorous professional registration, but I take what he says very seriously and I will look more closely at his concerns. I am very happy to meet him to discuss this issue further if he would like me to do so.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about pooling resources. There are now formal mechanisms for that to take place, such as section 75 and the ways in which CCGs and local authorities can work together. That is the point of having transforming care partnerships’ commissioners working together.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the exclusion of families from decisions. That really upsets me and it really should not happen. There are legal duties, under the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and the Mental Health Act 2007, to have independent mental health advocates. I would be very keen to speak to him further about what more we can do to make sure that the legislation is having the desired effect.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham knows I am a massive fan of hers. She has probably done more to further the cause of individuals with autism and their families than anybody else in the history of this building. She spoke with great knowledge about autism and was absolutely right to point out that transforming care is not only about learning disabilities but people with autism. In Think Autism, the adult autism strategy, we set a programme of action across Government to support autistic people to lead fulfilling and independent lives where possible. We have recently refreshed the governance arrangements that will achieve greater traction and delivery of the required outcomes, better supporting autistic people to live healthy independent lives and participate in their local communities.

My right hon. Friend spoke about autism care pathways. NHS England is developing a framework of adult community mental health services which will include care for adults with comorbid neurodevelopmental disorders and/or learning disabilities, rather than the pathways planned and set out in the “Five Year Forward View” implementation plan. NHS England’s care pathway programme has evolved to take account of the current operational context and expert service user advice. The pathway is linear about discrete episodes of care, so is more appropriate for specific interventions undertaken by specialist teams.

My right hon. Friend spoke about the barriers that autistic people face in accessing mental health services. Trusts should already be ensuring that services are accessible to people with autism and that they have made reasonable adjustments to care pathways to ensure that people with learning disabilities and autism can access the highly personalised care and achieve the equality of outcome that we all want.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood spoke about her constituent, Matthew Garnett. It was a great pleasure to meet the hon. Lady and Matthew’s mum, Isabelle, recently. I was very shocked to hear of Matthew’s experience and deeply upset to see the pictures of him at his lowest ebb, when he was suffering from the neglect that she spoke of. It was very distressing. I am pleased that the NHS is learning from this. The Marsh review into Matthew’s care has helped to shape a much more focused approach to the needs of children and young people who are at risk of slipping into the sort of crisis that she mentioned. The operational delivery group allows stakeholders, including young people, to shape policy.

Helen Hayes: The right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) raised the issue of St Andrew’s in Northampton having been able to expand so significantly with the benefit of NHS funding—I cannot remember the exact percentage, but the percentage of funding that comes from the NHS for St Andrew’s is up in the eighties and nineties. Does she agree that this is not the right model and will she commit to looking at limiting the further expansion of private in-patient beds, when they are not what is needed for treating young people with autism and learning disability?

Caroline Dinenage: We can certainly look at what the hon. Lady suggests. I am pleased that the operational delivery group, which I just mentioned, allows stakeholders to shape policy and it is really good news that Isabelle Garnett, Matthew’s mum, is a major contributor to this
and liaises with NHS England directly on its programme around children either in hospital or at risk of being admitted.

The right hon. Member for North Norfolk asked why the evaluation was cancelled. As he knows, an evaluation sponsored by NHS England is already under way, and the Department, having invited bids for its evaluation, was not satisfied that the proposals received were what was needed. That does not mean that we are not absolutely determined to critically review progress, particularly working with stakeholders and users.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about the “No voice unheard, no right ignored” Green Paper. Although I am always ready to bow to his incredible knowledge in this field, it is not entirely true to say that the Green Paper went unheeded. Some of the recommendations were overtaken by changes in Government policy, and indeed, in Governments, but we have taken forward work such as the named social worker pilot and a review of the Mental Health Act. We have asked Professor Sir Simon Wessely, the chair of the independent review, to listen to people with direct experience of the Mental Health Act and this, of course, includes autistic people and their carers. He published his interim report to update the Government on his progress, which sets out specific issues that we must explore to look at how we can improve the scope of the Act.

The hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood also spoke about training for teachers in autism. The Department for Education has funded training and support for teachers through the Autism Education Trust. That is in early years, schools and further education, and so far, 175,000 staff have been trained.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: Does my hon. Friend also welcome the fact that from September this year in initial teacher training, the possibility of having a module on autism will now be included? It is something that we worked very hard for and the Department for Education responded. This is about not just the historical training, which is so important, but the future training that is coming on-stream from September this year.

Caroline Dinenage: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that, and I am sure that its introduction is in no small part down to her incredible work.

Society has failed people with learning disabilities for too many years. Our aim is to put things right. People are at the heart of the transforming care delivery programme. The priority is to provide safe, high-quality care that is appropriate for everyone. We will continue to work with our partners to ensure that people with learning disabilities have the opportunity to live as full and independent lives as possible.

3.59 pm

Norman Lamb: I think I can safely say that the debate this afternoon has reflected quality rather than quantity. I am not referring to my own contribution, of course. We have focused on an important issue, and I am grateful that the Minister has treated it with the seriousness it deserves. I want quickly to highlight the key things that I think she needs to focus on, and I would be delighted to meet her to discuss them, perhaps together with the key organisations that I referred to at the start.

The Minister did not particularly focus on children in her response. If we are to have a system that works in a sustainable way in the long term, keeping children out of institutions will be key to solving the problem, particularly given that the numbers have doubled in the past few years and that we are going in the wrong direction. I particularly commend to her the brilliantly led Starfish programme in Norfolk as an exemplar of what can be done to keep people out of institutions.

On workforce training, I was pleased to hear about the money—£10 million, I think—for postgrads, but we also need training for the frontline staff in community settings who make the return to the community possible. A really important point was made about Alderwood and the experience of the constituents of the hon. Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes). I also talked about Fauzia in this context. Training is needed in how autism affects individuals. It is not just about training in autism generally. Understanding the impact on an individual is what is so important, as is wider community training.

The Minister said that mechanisms were now in place to shift money across. What I do not understand is why that does not appear to be working effectively enough. If it is there, why is it not happening routinely? Why cannot the money just shift to a local authority to facilitate a much-needed community place? I am reassured that the work will continue after March next year, but it needs a national programme. I am afraid that it cannot just be left to localities. We know that there are some great places around the country doing amazing work, but others are falling well behind. There needs to be an inspiring national drive and the sense of an imperative that things have to change, wherever people live.

On the cross-departmental work and the taskforce to which the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillan) referred, we must recognise the importance of employment opportunities. So many people can work and can be paid in work, and that of course relieves the burden on the statutory services. Understanding that, and recognising that housing plays a vital part in this—

Caroline Dinenage: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Norman Lamb: Am I allowed to give way, Madam Deputy Speaker? I am coming to the end of my response very soon—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Technically, no. The right hon. Gentleman has a strict two minutes to sum up at the end. However, I recognise that really important issues are being discussed here, and the Minister clearly has something to add. I am not creating a precedent here, but I am, unusually, allowing her to intervene.

Caroline Dinenage: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My lack of understanding of the rules is clearly shining through quite beautifully here. I completely forgot to say earlier that we have an inter-ministerial group on disability in society which met for the first time yesterday, and I hope that it will go some way towards achieving some of the improvements that the right hon. Gentleman wants to see.
Norman Lamb: I am very glad to hear that. I was unaware that I had only two minutes, so I am really sorry, but I am pleased that you are so chilled out this afternoon, Madam Deputy Speaker. I applaud you for that.

I am pleased that the Minister has said that we must learn the lessons from the mortality review. Also, we must recognise the critical importance of involving the individual and the family in the decision making and in shaping the programme, in every case. This is about human rights, and human rights are routinely being abused and ignored. That must end. I am grateful to everyone who has spoken in the debate to highlight the critical issues involved in giving people the chance of a good life.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House is concerned at the slow progress made under the Transforming Care programme, which was set up to improve the care and quality of life of children and adults with a learning disability and/or autism who display behaviour that challenges; recognises that a substantial number of people with learning disabilities remain trapped in, and continue to be inappropriately admitted to, Assessment and Treatment Units rather than living with support in the community; is further concerned at the lack of capacity within community services; notes evidence of the neglect, abuse, poor care, and premature deaths of people with learning disabilities; believes that the Transforming Care programme is unlikely to realise the ambitions set out in the Building the Right Support strategy before it ends in March 2019; calls on the Government to establish, prioritise, and adequately resource a successor programme that delivers a shift away from institutional care by investing in community services across education, health and social care; and further calls on the Government to ensure that such a programme is based on lifelong support that protects people’s human rights and promotes their independence and wellbeing.

Alison Thewlis (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is there a means of putting it on record that the House’s business has finished just after 4 o’clock, collapsing an hour early, even though our important debate on baby leave in the House got pulled because of insufficient time? I understand that both this afternoon’s Westminster Hall debates also finished early. Do you agree that there ought to be a better way of organising business in the House so that important issues that need to be discussed have the time they need for discussion when other business falls short?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I understand the hon. Lady’s point and her frustration that the debate on proxy voting, which we were all looking forward to, has not taken place, but she will understand that time had to be given in today’s proceedings for the Home Secretary to come to the House and address an urgent and important matter that arose only yesterday and which no one could have predicted. I am also aware that the timetabling of today’s business was so arranged, with a 2.30 pm cut-off for the first debate, because the Government were anxious to protect the time for the important matter we have just discussed in Back-Bench time. In saying that, I hope that those observing our proceedings will appreciate that the lack of Members in the Chamber did not reflect the importance the House attaches to this matter. It is extremely important: some of us have been debating these matters here for decades and are finally beginning to make progress. So while I take her point—it is well made—the fact is that sometimes the House has to adjust to events in the world outside, and that was why the Home Secretary needed time this afternoon.

PETITION

Planning Application: Chelveston-cum-Caldecott

4.7 pm

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I am grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Tom Pursglove) is in the Chamber because this petition affects his constituency as much as mine. I have presented many petitions in this House, but this is probably the one I am most concerned about. It refers to a planning application in my constituency for what is called a recycling plant, but is something that will create dioxins and other dangerous chemicals. There is no similar plant in this country. I do not want, in a few years, to find out that babies born in my constituency are deformed. The lead petitioners are Kaye Pentland, Tony Dawson and Martin Izzard, who are all members of RAID—Residents Against Inappropriate Development—which is the community group opposing the planning application. The petition has been signed by several hundred of my constituents.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of Chelveston-cum-Caldecott and the surrounding areas,

Sheweth,

That the Petitioners believe that the proposed development by Energy Roots Ltd planning application No. 18/00006/WASFUL for a Construction of a Plastic Recycling and Recovery Facility, should be refused on the grounds of the great cost to the environment, agricultural land, and residents with harmful emissions from the plant. Hazardous emissions will include Nitrogen Dioxide, Sulphur Dioxide, Nitric Acid, Hydrogen Chloride, Ammonia, Particulate matter, Dioxins and Furans.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Communities and Local Government, Northamptonshire County Council and East Northamptonshire Council to take in account the concerns of petitioners and refuse to grant the planning application for a Plastic Recycling and Recovery Facility to Energy Roots Ltd.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[P002173]
Paupers’ Funerals

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mims Davies.]

4.9 pm

Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Losing a loved one is heartbreaking. Almost everyone in this House will have suffered the loss of a loved one: a parent, a grandparent, a friend, or even—the worst nightmare of all—a child. Funerals provide the chance of a final goodbye. They allow us to grieve, as a family or as friends, sharing the loss of someone close. The ability to say goodbye at a funeral is a necessary part of the grieving process, a staging post in loss. Funerals can change moods. They can lift hearts. Sharing stories and reflecting on memories keep the spirit of the one we have lost alive in our hearts, minds and memories. It is because of the importance of the shared experience of grief that the character of the last parting matters so very much.

Public health funerals, or national assistance funerals as they are called in Scotland, occur when a family cannot, or in a minority of cases refuses to, pay the cost of the funeral of a departed relative or other loved one. As we would and should expect in a civilised and compassionate country, the state, in the form of local councils, steps in to cover the cost of a basic funeral. However, recent press and media coverage has revealed the shocking reality of public health funerals, which are sometimes callous, careless or even cruel. Dubbed “paupers’ funerals”, they can be occasions on which, as an official from Bracknell Forest Council has put it: “There’s no attendee, no keeping of the ashes. Nobody’s invited; you don’t have any say over the funeral at all...it’s literally as basic as basic can get.”

That is what modern paupers’ funerals are: the reduction of a human life to something that is “as basic as basic can get”.

As a Christian country, we surely believe that every life has intrinsic value. I follow, or at least try to follow, the commandment to treat others as I would wish to be treated. There can be no pretence that these public health funerals fulfil our Christian duty. They are the very antithesis of what Christ taught us.

In the 1860s, Charles Dickens wrote of that ultimate manifestation of the cruel neglect at the rotten core of liberal utilitarianism, the Poor Law—which included the original scourge of paupers’ funerals—that it was “to degrade a Christian’s duty into a charlatan’s trick”.

To the shame of our age, Dickens’ s words remain an apt description of modern public health funerals.

The hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) moved us all when she recounted the heartbreaking story of losing her son. She has already succeeded in changing Government policy on children’s funerals, and now I hope that I can play a part in changing it on public health funerals. There are two things that the Government can do to bring about change and to relive the pressure of funeral poverty. First, they can carry out an urgent review of the 15-year-old cap on funeral expenses payments. In April 2003, a £700 cap was imposed, and it has since remained in place. The payment is combined with help that is intended to cover some of the cost of a burial plot, cremation fees, travel, the moving of a body and death certificates. However, a maximum of £700 is hardly sufficient, even with those supplements.

The policy is simply no longer fit for purpose. When the cap was introduced in 2003, the average cost of a funeral was £1,920. Since then, the price of funerals has increased by 112%. That means that the £700 of assistance offered would, on average, cover about 17% of the cost of a funeral, compared with 36% in 2003. Given that, it is hardly surprising that the number of public health funerals has increased by more than 200% since 1997. The Government should examine whether more can be done to alleviate the financial burden of funerals. The Minister will know that the Department for Work and Pensions began to help last year by allowing recipients of funeral payments to receive additional contributions without deductions, by extending the application period for a claim from three to six months, by clarifying that the funeral payments will cover the cost of a burial with or without exclusive rights of burial, and with the ability to submit evidence electronically. Nevertheless, it is time to do more.

The heart of reform must be an urgent examination of the appalling way in which some public health funerals are routinely conducted. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) was surely right to say that “the idea that because you are poor you should have no tangible means through which to remember and pay your respects for a loved one is appalling.”

The Government should issue statutory guidance to every relevant local authority describing in detail best practice in the conduct of public health funerals.

In the absence of such guidance, bad practice has persisted. According to The Sunday Times, a number of councils, including Glasgow and Bracknell Forest, imposed bans on family and friends attending these funerals and denied the bereaved the remains of their deceased loved ones. Who could possibly believe that grieving families should be forbidden from saying a last goodbye to those lost to the grave? I am pleased to say that my own council, South Holland, always ensures that family members can attend and are made aware of the date of the funeral, with the proper dignity and respect that such an occasion deserves. Furthermore, authorities must without any quibbling make the ashes of the deceased available to loved ones. A Glasgow City Council official was recorded telling a reporter: “It’s us having to pay for it, so, as I say, she will not get his ashes back.”

That is appalling. Local authorities should have a duty to surrender the remains to the family; the ashes, just like the memories, belong to those who loved the departed. I understand that in some local authorities, such as mine, it is less expensive to bury someone than to cremate them. The problem seems to be centred on those places where cremation is the cheapest option.

Finally, it is the comforting delusion of those who regard the past with disdain—perhaps from misplaced guilt, or because they know little or nothing of it—that our age is at the apex of accomplishment. The more thoughtful here know that many things were once better.

For now, in our time, paupers’ funerals ban children from mothers’ gravesides. Now, in our kingdom, some public officials refuse to inform children of their father’s cremation. Now, in this age, parents who have loved and
lost cannot keep their child’s ashes to scatter or retain. This outrage must end, and the Government must make it happen.

4.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is a pleasure to be responding to my first debate at the Dispatch Box with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in the Chair, who were presiding when I made my maiden speech, and to be responding to my right hon. Friend, and indeed my friend, the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes).

My right hon. Friend spoke with his famed eloquence and passion, but also with typical compassion, on a hugely important issue about which, in our compassionate and decent society, we should all care. As he said, a funeral plays a huge part in helping all of us, at one of the most difficult points in our lives, come to terms with loss and grief. This issue was also more broadly raised in a debate in Westminster Hall last October by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh).

Public health funerals are likely to become necessary when either, sadly, a deceased person dies alone with no family or friends to organise a funeral or because the bereaved family does not, or is for various reasons unable to, make funeral arrangements. In either situation, the relevant local authority has a statutory duty under section 46 of the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to make arrangements for the disposal of the body. To respond to my right hon. Friend’s points, it is important to highlight that the 1984 Act contains no statutory requirement for the local authority to make any arrangements beyond that, nor is it prescriptive of how they deliver on their obligation nor does it contain provision for regulations for statutory guidance or instruction on how they must do so. However, I hear my right hon. Friend’s point, and I have asked my Department to clarify and confirm that my understanding of that position is correct.

In a humane and civilised society, it is reasonable, and indeed proper, to expect that the deceased person and, where they can be involved, their bereaved family are treated with the dignity and compassion they deserve. I am sure that that is what happens in many local authority areas. For example, I have recently heard of a council where officials routinely attend public health funerals themselves—I believe that this is the case in the City of Westminster, among many others—to ensure that the deceased person is not alone in that final act.

However, the Government and I, like my right hon. Friend, are deeply concerned at the alleged practices of some local authorities, such as refusing to tell bereaved families where and when the funeral is taking place or refusing to return their loved one’s remains following cremation. Media reports—my right hon. Friend alluded to the report in The Sunday Times in May—suggest that that may be an attempt to deter future reliance on the local authority’s obligation to step in if other arrangements cannot be made. We all appreciate that local authorities should be mindful of public money, providing a decent funeral be a priority and that care is taken with that public money, but the key thing is that word “decent”. I am deeply concerned that, if true, the reports suggest completely unacceptable behaviour that would be putting bereaved families through unnecessary additional stress and insensitive treatment at an already extremely difficult time in their lives and when they are, in many cases, already managing on a low income. This is about sensitivity, decency and doing the right thing, and that should permeate the approach. I urge all local authorities to reflect on those words.

The legislation and lack of centralised control and powers to mandate is a reflection of the fact that public health funerals are a cross-cutting issue, that local authorities are best placed to determine local priorities and that this matter has sat with local authorities for many decades. It is a pleasure to be here answering on the behalf of the Ministry of Justice today, but colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government all have a role to play. Historically, the Government have not centrally collated information on the number and cost of the public health funerals that councils manage annually. However, a series of freedom of information requests in recent years appear to show a consistent rise in both elements. The most recent of these requests, published by ITV News last month, was based on responses from 300 councils across the UK. It indicated that there has been a 20% increase in the number of public health funerals in the past three years, to around 15,000 last year, at a cost to local authorities of around £4 million in the last financial year.

As I have alluded to, local authorities are independent from central Government in providing their services and are responsible to their own electors and for managing their budgets in line with local priorities. That is how it should be and, as a former councillor, I recognise the importance of that local accountability and local decision making. However, that does not obviate the need for those local authorities to reflect on their obligations with the moneys they have given to them to ensure that this area is not neglected. It is absolutely right that local priorities should determine local spending, but I urge local authorities to reflect on my words about decency.

As my right hon. Friend alluded to, the Government have acted to address the financial pressures that death and bereavement can put on both families and local authorities. On 1 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced her intention to establish a children’s funeral fund for England, which all Members would warmly welcome, with the intention that, at such an incredibly difficult and distressing time in their lives, bereaved parents will not have to worry about the essential costs of burying or cremating their child. As the House will know, arrangements for similar funding have already been put in place by the Welsh Assembly Government, and the Scottish Government have recently announced their intention to do the same.

This difficult but important issue has, of course, been championed by the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris). Although she is not in her place today, I take the opportunity to pay tribute to her for her work, for her tenacity and for her courage in doing so in the light of her own tragic experience. She is an hon. Lady of great decency, commitment and compassion. This House is the better for her presence, and her constituents are lucky to have her representing their interests.

The hon. Lady has continued in her work to support those for whom death and bereavement bring unmanageable financial pressure. On 8 June she co-ordinated and sent
a cross-party letter to the Prime Minister, supported by a significant number of hon. Members, calling for the establishment of minimum standards in the provision of public health funerals by local authorities. This action was prompted by concern about the media reports that gave rise to today’s debate, and I understand my right hon. Friend is responding to that letter.

Public health funerals are not needed in the vast majority of deaths. I have mentioned the figure of 15,000 public health funerals a year, which represents around 3% of the total annual number of deaths in the UK. It is right that, where a family are in a position to take responsibility for the cost of funeral arrangements, they should do so. However, there are times when state support is appropriate and necessary, and we are committed to supporting vulnerable people going through bereavement who, depending on their situation, may need to draw on different elements of support.

That support, as my right hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings alluded to, includes the provision of funeral expenses payments to help people on qualifying benefits with the cost of arranging a funeral. Such payments make a significant contribution to the cost of a simple, respectful, decent funeral, covering the necessary costs of burial or cremation and in addition up to £700 for other funeral expenses.

Mr Hayes: I am sure the Minister is just about to announce it, and I do not want to steal his thunder because he is a fine new member of the Government, but I called for the cap to be lifted. He may want to make that announcement now and make a big impact, or he might want to reflect and write to me about it very soon.

Edward Argar: My right hon. Friend is typically beguiling in attempting to persuade me to announce changes to policy from the Dispatch Box. However, the funding offered from the funeral expenses payments scheme and the social fund budgeting loan—he has referred to other measures taken by the Government, such as changing the rules so that additional contributions may be received without deductions being necessary from that fund—provides a level of support while, crucially, maintaining a fiscally viable fund.

I hear my right hon. Friend’s comments about the 2003 cap on that second element, and I will ensure that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse)—the Department for Work and Pensions administers the fund—is made aware of my right hon. Friend’s comments and of the case he has made today. I sense my ministerial colleague may well be writing to him in response to that specific point.

In conclusion, I wish to thank my right hon. Friend for providing this hugely valuable opportunity to discuss, once again, such an important and sensitive issue. It is of course a truism that death touches us all. For many of us, the funeral arrangements are something that can be planned for and managed, but for some they are something for which the local authority and local government must take on responsibility, in a sense representing the local community. I believe that many councils do so honourably and carry out their duties with utmost respect for the dignity of the deceased person and their family. However, as I have said, it is of deep concern that some allegedly do not. I conclude by exhorting those few to show the compassion and sensitivity any of us would wish to be shown were we to find ourselves in those circumstances. I also reiterate the clear commitment of the Prime Minister, this Government and myself, as a Minister, to work with colleagues to ensure that the system of public health funerals continues to provide that decency and decent send-off we would all wish for.

Question put and agreed to.

4.31 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Friday 6 July 2018

The House met at half-past Nine o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

9.34 am

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 163), and negatived.

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. My point of order arises from what happened following the sitting on 15 June and Lord Pannick’s article in The Times yesterday on the need for Bills to be scrutinised properly. We do not know how many of the 34 Bills on today’s Order Paper will be discussed before 2.30. I personally hope we will be able to reach the Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on the legalisation of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

I seek your advice on those Bills that will not be debated today. How can it be made clear to the Government, parliamentary colleagues and the wider public, including social media, that an objection to a Bill going through on the nod is not a commentary on the merits of the contents of the Bill, but a demand for proper scrutiny? I am sure, for example, that if the Government object to my Public Sector Exit Payments (Limitation) Bill today, it will not be because they object to the substance, which they concede will save the taxpayer hundreds of millions of pounds.

Is there any way in which we can ensure an opportunity for the reasons for objections to be articulated, and can you also advise on what can be done to dampen public expectations that Bills debated today should, on the whim of the Government, be able to queue-jump Bills that have been successful in the private Member’s ballot, received a Second Reading and are waiting for the Government to facilitate discussion in Committee? If the Government support a private Member’s Bill, is not the proper course to convert it into a Government Bill, as has been done with the Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. Under existing arrangements, an objection at the moment of interruption suffices to prevent the progress of a Bill. There is no provision for an explanation of the reasons for that objection. If our private Member’s Bill procedure were to be reformed, as many people—myself and the Procedure Committee included—were to be successful in bringing about, if there were to be a change to the procedure, part of the change could relate to the objection process. However, if memory serves me correctly, when the Procedure Committee recommended a change to the existing procedure, it did not recommend—and nobody else recommended—a change on that point.

There was of course great controversy three weeks ago, and the hon. Gentleman has to fend for himself in the public domain in seeking to defend his decision. In procedural terms, I emphasise that no impropriety took place. That is all that I can say today. It would be perfectly possible for the House to reform the private Member’s Bill procedure, but not everybody in the House wishes to do so, and it has been obvious to me that the Government have not wished to do so. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) brought forward a report on this matter, which the Government have shown no enthusiasm for bringing to the House with a view to implementing. We had better leave it there, if there are no further points of order.

Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill

Third Reading

Debate resumed.

Question (15 June) again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

9.38 am

Sir Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to give us a little more information today on her plans on the issue of the code of conduct. The advisory code is key to the Bill, and when we discussed it last time she said that she would bring draft guidance forward. I hope she will be able to tell me today whether that will be done before the Bill reaches the other place, so that there can be a proper discussion of the contents of the draft guidance at the same time as the substance of the Bill is discussed. I will give her the chance to intervene when she has the answer to that question.

In the meantime, I thank the Minister for responding to the point that I made on Report, when I asked which products were licensed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for the purposes of restraint. She has now written back to say:

“there are no products in the UK which are licensed for chemical restraint as defined in the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Bill.

However, a number of psychiatric medications can be used for rapid management of acute agitation in psychiatric patients. Of these products, Haloperidol 5mg/ml Solution for Injection is indicated for rapid control of severe acute psychomotor agitation associated with psychotic disorder or manic episodes of bipolar I disorder, when oral therapy is not appropriate.

Clinicians in the UK are primarily guided by the advice about rapid tranquilisation given in the following documents: Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines; Rapid Tranquilisation Algorithm by the Royal College of Psychiatrists; and the Rapid Tranquilisation section from Restrictive Interventions for Managing Violence and Aggression, which is published by the National Institute for Care Excellence.”

I put that on record because it is relevant to our discussion on Report, and I am grateful to her for writing to me with those details. I will give way if she has any more news about the guidance.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): The guidance will be published and consulted on. Clearly, it would be inappropriate to propose guidance until Parliament has passed this legislation, but we fully undertake to consult
all those with an interest. We expect that debate to take place so we can implement the Bill, if passed, within a year of its passage.

Sir Christopher Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I hope that is the maximum timetable, rather than the minimum.

Mr Speaker: Has the hon. Gentleman completed his remarkably brief oration?

Sir Christopher Chope: I have indeed, Mr Speaker.

9.41 am

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) (LD): I speak briefly to confirm my very strong support for this Bill, to congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on pursuing it, and to pay tribute to the extraordinary stoicism of Seni’s parents, Mr and Mrs Lewis. I am not sure whether they are here today, but we owe it to them that something good comes from the tragedy of the loss of their son. When I was a Minister, I published new guidance aimed at ending the use of prone restraint—the sort of restraint used on Seni Lewis—and radically reducing the use of other restraint.

Depressingly, although it may in part be due to better reporting, the data shows very little change in the overall use of force in mental health units across the country. The truth is that force is endemic in many in-patient units. However, we also know that many units have managed to reduce the use of force substantially.

On therapeutic care and recovery, we have to confront, as a country, the use of force in our mental health units and, if we do not do that, we will never achieve the ambition of facilitating recovery for people who have experienced mental ill health. Frequently, people who find themselves in mental health units have suffered abuse in their life. For a woman who has suffered abuse, restraint, with many people holding her down to the floor, is just a repeat of that abuse. Such restraint destroys trust between staff and patient and completely undermines therapeutic care.

It is possible to achieve a much greater reduction in the use of force. This Bill, particularly through the transparency and accountability it brings, will be enormously beneficial in seeking to change that culture. I strongly support the Bill for that reason.

9.44 am

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I start by commending the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) for his dedication to the Bill and, more importantly, for his dedication to his constituent Seni Lewis and his family, who have been through unimaginable tragedy.

The hon. Gentleman’s campaign to highlight the issues that the Lewis family have faced and to create a positive change in mental health practices is admirable and a true reflection of the care and compassion he applies to his role in his local community. As he knows, and as we have discussed on a number of occasions, I support the core principles of what he is aiming to do. The Bill is something of a curate’s egg, because some bits are very good, some bits are bad and, most frustratingly—this happens with virtually every Bill that comes before the House—some bits could have been much better, as he and I both agree.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) mentioned, the Minister said on Report that she could not agree to certain things being included in the Bill but that she wants them to be included in statutory guidance. I will outline my understanding of the things that will go into statutory guidance, which the Minister will hopefully either confirm or correct. Hopefully, as I have always intended, the Bill will then be able to complete its passage in no time at all.

Clause 5, on training in appropriate use of force, is a positive step forward in the care of patients. It is an important change, as it centres on the very core of health services—the patient. Key elements of the training programme are listed in subsection (2). The use of techniques for avoiding or reducing the use of force, and the risk associated with the use of force are two fundamental points that are vital when restraint methods are part of a medical care plan.

It must not be forgotten that the most forceful restraint methods are advised to be used as a last resort. Medical staff should be fully versed in a wealth of techniques to avoid such restraints, where possible, but it must not be assumed that restraint should be banned altogether. Unfortunately, there are times when forceful restraint is necessary, but it is essential that such techniques are used with a full knowledge of the associated risks.

It is regrettable that my amendment 12, on introducing training on acute behavioural disturbance, was not accepted on Report, as it would have enhanced the Bill. I thank the hon. Member for Croydon North for supporting that amendment. I have been advised by the Minister that such training will be added to statutory guidance instead, and I thank her for sending me a letter on Wednesday to follow up on many of these points.

My concern, and I would like some clarification, is how the statutory guidance will be worded. In her letter to me, the Minister quoted the 2015 National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidelines, which state that training on ABD “should be included in staff training”.

The whole point of my amendment is that it would have ensured training on ABD must be included in staff training. My concern is that guidance is just that, guidance, rather than something that is mandatory. This is an opportunity to ensure the thorough education of staff on something we have established to be central to the Bill.

I therefore hope the Minister is able to confirm, whether today or in future, that training on acute behavioural disturbance must, rather than just should, be included in staff training. It must be mandatory.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I appreciate my hon. Friend’s frustration. One of the difficulties with clause 5, inevitably, is that a list of criteria could go on forever. He is right to highlight the issues of acute behavioural disturbance, which we consider already to be enshrined in guidance. I completely take his point, and I give him an assurance that we will use statutory guidance to make it very clear that staff need to be fully trained on acute behavioural disturbance, not least because, unless staff understand it, they cannot be proportionate when the use of force is, indeed, appropriate.
Philip Davies: I am very grateful to the Minister for that positive intervention, and we look forward to seeing that guidance when it is brought forward.

On clause 5, I am also supportive of the focus on involving “patients in the planning, development and delivery of care and treatment”.

I would have preferred to see that extended to the patient’s family, as was proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, because, as we know, mental illness does not affect just the patient; it can affect those near and dear to them, too. Again, the Minister stated on Report that she would seek to put this into statutory guidance and I hope she intends to follow through with that, because many family members would think it is very important.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): As chair of the Westminster Commission on Autism, may I tell the hon. Gentleman that many people in the commission have a great interest in this Bill and support it? He has started off very reasonably in his remarks and I hope he will continue in that reasonable way, because the autism community want to see this Bill become law.

Philip Davies: Absolutely. The hon. Gentleman is not alone in that, and nor is the autism community—I want the Bill to become law, too. If he had not intervened on me, we could have completed this a bit sooner. I assure him that this Third Reading will complete very soon. I certainly do not intend to go on for long today and I do not think anyone else does. We want to complete this as quickly as possible and see the Bill on the statute book. I want to see that just as much as he does.

Clause 6 deals with recording the use of force and I am very supportive of having this in the Bill. It is right to record the carrying out of such practices on patients. The police have a system in place when using restraint as part of their role, so it is only right that medical staff should follow suit. I am advised by my local care trust that it does have some measures in place to record restraint of a patient, but this Bill will of course make it a legal requirement to do so, which is important and absolutely right. Again, I was disappointed that my amendment proposing that these records be added to the patient’s medical records was not accepted. As I have stated, restraint is considered to be a form of medical care and therefore should be documented in the patient’s medical notes. That would help people to know what reaction the patient had had when restraint had happened in the past. I hope the Minister will make sure that the statutory guidance can be used and updated to make sure that these things are added to people’s medical records at the same time. I hope she will be able to confirm that in the fullness of time, too.

On clause 6(5), the information listed to be included in the report is largely constructive. Where I feel it falls short is in insisting on adding what are referred to as “relevant characteristics”. As the hon. Member for Croydon North knows too well, I do not agree that that is necessary. I am of the opinion that including these “relevant characteristics” detailing race, sexuality, religion, marital status and so on is purely a politically correct gesture in order to be seen to be doing something to combat discrimination, when instead it causes the illusion of discrimination. There is a notion that this creates a more transparent mental health service, but that is not the case. For instance, the detailing of these “relevant characteristics” will extend only to the patient and not the staff. My amendment to say that staff members should be included in this was also supported by the hon. Gentleman, for which I am grateful. I hope that the Minister takes on board those points and will ensure that the statutory guidance she produces in conjunction with the Bill will set out that staff members’ “relevant characteristics” will be included alongside those of the patient.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I confirm to my hon. Friend that we will reflect on that when we come to discuss this matter with consultees. I want also to come back to the point he made earlier about families. On the face of it, we should be enshrining the rights of families in the Bill, recognising, as the hon. Member for Croydon North knows too well, I do not agree that that creates a severe disproportion. As the hon. Gentleman, for which I am grateful. I hope that the Minister takes on board those points and will ensure that the statutory guidance she produces in conjunction with the Bill will set out that staff members’ “relevant characteristics” will be included alongside those of the patient.

Philip Davies: Again, I am very grateful to the Minister for that and for her positive approach to ensuring that the points being raised here and that we raised on Report will be considered for the statutory guidance. We will therefore look forward to seeing it when it is published.

Finally, I wish to refer to clause 12, which deals with video recording and specifically details the police use of body-worn cameras when assisting in restraint at a mental health unit. Largely, police body cameras are used in this instance, unless there are special circumstances. I am a big fan of body-worn cameras, which are a beneficial tool for both officers, protecting them when complaints are made about them, and the public, in making sure that the true facts of a situation are seen by everybody. However, the Bill states that the police “must take a body camera” and “must wear it and keep it operating at all times”.

It goes on to state that a “failure” to “comply” makes “the officer liable to criminal…proceedings.”

As the Minister and the hon. Member for Croydon North know, I feel that that creates a severe disproportion of consequences between the actions of the police and the actions of the medical staff.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Clause 12(4) states:

“A failure by a police officer to comply with the requirements…does not…make the officer criminally liable. I think I am right in saying that such an officer would not be criminally liable. If I have misunderstood this, I am happy to be corrected.

Philip Davies: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. I cannot recall whether he was here on Report, but we went through this in some detail then and so I do not wish to test the patience of the House by going through it all again this morning. If he looks
back at the transcript of the debate, he might not be so confident in what he said. I think there is some doubt about this provision and it offers some doubt for police officers, who have also looked at the Bill. Notwithstanding that intervention by my hon. Friend, may I ask that the Minister takes this issue into careful consideration when creating the statutory guidance, if that provides an opportunity to look at this? I ask her to make sure that there are no unintended consequences. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) sums up exactly what is intended by the Government and the promoter of the Bill, but I hope that when the Minister brings forward her statutory guidance she will clarify the situation, because police officers are concerned about it.

Jackie Doyle-Price: Perhaps I can give my hon. Friend reassurance by saying that the College of Policing will be fully involved in the development of the statutory guidance.

Philip Davies: Again, I am extremely grateful for that and am pleased to hear it.

To conclude, I reiterate my support for the Member for Croydon North with his private Member’s Bill. As I have said on a number of occasions, I support the core principles of the Bill, although I feel that there have been some missed opportunities to achieve fully the objectives he set out. I hope that his constituents, the Lewis family, feel that the Bill is something they can proudly remember the life of Seni Lewis through, knowing that his death was not in vain. It was a terrible tragedy for the family, but it was not in vain, in the sense that they have worked very hard and constructively, and they have a fantastic Member of Parliament who has taken on board their campaign, on the back of which they have played their part in making sure that the terrible thing that happened to Seni Lewis does not happen to other families. On that basis, we should all be pleased that the Bill is passing its Third Reading today.

9.59 pm

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): It is a privilege to contribute briefly to this Third Reading debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on getting the Bill to this stage, and hope that there will be sufficient support for it when we vote later.

As a patron of Mind in Haringey, I know that there is a real sense of urgency regarding the need to improve the quality of services in mental health provision, not only locally but nationally. Whether it is basic primary care assistance to prevent the decline in a patient’s mental health, or at peak crisis time when psychosis, mania or the depths of the lows for a bipolar sufferer strike, it is crucial that care is provided in a professional, sensitive and compassionate manner.

Tragically, the Bill does not reflect the fatal experience of just one 23-year-old young man from my hon. Friend’s constituency: Seni Lewis died following restraint by 11 police officers while he was in a mental health unit. That was not an isolated incident. Thousands of patients have suffered abusive restraint, with too little guidance and supervision for police and mental health professionals on how best to manage mental health crisis. The high number of injuries—3,652 this year, according to the women’s charity Agenda—has been compounded by the reduction in spending on mental health wards, the cuts to training budgets for support workers, and the increased social isolation experienced by people with poor mental health. All too often, the warning signs are not picked up until a patient is very ill. Because of the lax reporting requirements on the use of restraint in the sector, it is likely that the available statistics under-report the extent of poor practice.

In a similar case highlighted by the charity Inquest, Surrey dad Terry Smith suffered at the hands of those who owed him a duty of care and he died in an ambulance, following restraint. When his behaviour became worrying, Terry’s family knew that he needed an ambulance; instead, he was met by police who, rather than seeing a vulnerable man in crisis, pursued, restrained, bound and hooded him, and then took him to a police station rather than a hospital. They only called for an ambulance when it was too late.

Seni’s law will strengthen the guidance for police and mental health professionals so that medical emergencies are recognised as such and acted on speedily. The incident occurred before the introduction of body-warn cameras. It was pleasing to hear the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) speak about best practice for body-warn cameras. When the Bill passes into law, it will assist many of our constituents, but it will disproportionately protect the high number of young women who are restrained and the high number of black and ethnic minority patients who suffer the highest number of injuries in mental health facilities.

In my first Adjournment debate, shortly after I entered the House in 2015, I highlighted the desperate need for better resourced, higher-quality mental healthcare in my constituency. This Bill will go some way towards that by bringing more clarity and better reporting standards and it will set the bar higher for police and NHS staff, as well as for mental health advocates, but most importantly it will set the bar higher for those constituents whose pain is often invisible, inexpressible, frightening and overwhelming, and who sadly so often miss out on what we all expect from health carers: clarity of purpose, clear communication, understanding and compassion.
One big issue in recent years has been the detention of people with mental health problems in police station prison cells, where they do not have the appropriate level of support which they would have access to in a mental health unit. The problem is twofold: first, there are problems with the process and resources at police stations for looking after people with mental ill health; and, secondly, there is a lack of mental health beds in many local communities. Both issues are being addressed through increases in mental health funding, with the Government pledging an additional £1 billion between 2016 and 2021.

I was pleased to hear in March that the number of people being detained in police cells in Devon and Cornwall when suffering a mental health crisis was zero, and I hope that is still the case. I look forward to seeing the numbers and hope that they are still very low. Since 2013, the figures for the number of people put in a cell alongside offenders, under section 136 of the Mental Health Act, have steadily decreased, from 800 to just 31 in 2017.

I welcome clause 2, which will ensure that mental health units have registered managers, and clauses 3 and 4, which will ensure that those managers will publish a written policy regarding the use of force on patients and that there is information explaining patients’ rights in relation to the use of force. I am particularly pleased that clause 5 will ensure that the appropriate training is in place for staff who work in mental health units. That will include making sure that staff involve patients in the planning, development and delivery of care in the unit. The risk associated with using force, its effect on a patient’s mental and physical health, and any use of force could all affect a patient’s development.

I welcome the provisions in the Bill on the use of video recording in units to make sure that any use of force is transparent and accountable. In pursuit of a more transparent system, I support clauses 8 and 9, which legislate for the publication by the Secretary of State of statistics on the use of force and an annual review of any deaths that result from the use of force. It is important that we learn from tragic incidents such as those we have heard about during our consideration of the Bill. The publication of statistics and the review of incidents will make sure that the legislation continues to work properly into the future and that patients are protected.

Once again, I welcome the Bill and the reforms that it will introduce. I wish the hon. Member for Croydon North every success in getting it through Parliament.

10.6 am

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): It is a privilege to be here today. Members from all parties are often in a quandary about whether and how to be here on a Friday when we also have constituency commitments, but it was important to me that I be here today to support my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed). He has been a shining example to us all—Opposition and Government Members—of how best to use a private Member’s Bill slot as a member of the Opposition. He has put forward a change to the law in a way that has essentially secured support from Members on both sides of the House, as we have heard from the speeches so far. He has not only carried Members with him but achieved the Government’s support. I do not want to jinx anything, but I anticipate and hope that, at the end of today’s deliberations, the Bill will progress to the other place.

It has been a privilege for me to play a small part in the process, having served on the Bill Committee. I also stand here on behalf of the Labour Campaign for Mental Health. Many people outside this place are following our discussions today and have followed what has happened to get to this point. People with lived experience, family members and clinical professionals are really pleased that we are working on something that is productive and positive. I believe, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North, that it will effect some change in our country.

I do not seek to speak for long, but wish to reflect on a few reasons why the Bill is so important. I hope that we will be joined by Mr and Mrs Lewis—I know that they are on their way—because it is a testament to them and to their courage and bravery that they have worked to ensure that, in the wake of the tragedy that they have experienced, some good will come from the tragic death of their son. Members from all parties have come together today to reflect on Seni’s death.

But it is not just Seni’s death; in fact, only this week we heard about some research done by the UK-based charity Agenda, which campaigns for women and girls at risk. That research shows that over the past five years, from 2012-13 to 2016-17, 32 women who were detained under the Mental Health Act died after experiencing restraint. That is another example of why the issues we are discussing are so important. Those 32 women lost their lives as a result of what happened to them in mental health units.

If we look a little more closely at the figures, we see that younger women made up the majority of those restraint-related deaths, and more than a fifth of them were from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. I listened very closely to the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies), but I do think that it is important, in the context of what we are discussing today, to look very closely at defined and protected characteristics. We are seeing certain groups disproportionately affected by this action in more ways than others.

Many programmes have shone a spotlight on what happens inside some of our mental health services, in particular, the Dispatches programme “Inside The Priory”, which was shown on Channel 4 back in February. It had to use undercover cameras to expose what happened in one unit alone. It was particularly disturbing, because it showed the high-stress environments that exist in some, but certainly not all, of our mental health in-patient units. I have had the privilege of visiting a number across the country. However, when people find themselves in a crisis in such an environment, all too often, unfortunately, the staff are temporary, or they are bank staff or agency staff. To echo what others have said today, the fact that we have a recruitment crisis in this sector will have an impact on someone’s recovery. We should be doing everything possible to ensure that those environments are therapeutic and that they lead to someone’s recovery. I see this as something that is absolutely critical, but is it not a shame that we are discussing it today, and that we have to make this law? Actually, we should be doing everything possible to...
prevent people from getting into in-patient units in the first place, but if they are there, the settings should be right, the staff should be trained and full-time and the environment should be therapeutic. The fact that that is not the case is why this law is even more crucial.

We need to do everything possible to eradicate restrictive practices in in-patient care. This law is crucial in ensuring that when these things happen, everything possible is done to protect patients, to ensure that they are given a voice, and to ensure that they are not held or treated in a way that will exacerbate the very condition that saw them go into a mental health in-patient unit in the first place. Once again, I echo my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North for all the work that he has done to get us to where we are today.

10.11 am

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I too add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on introducing this Bill and on his tireless efforts to guide this important piece of legislation through the House. I was here last month, when this Bill was last discussed, but unfortunately I did not get an opportunity to contribute, so I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of it today.

This is a sensible Bill. It follows recent announcements by the Prime Minister and Ministers addressing mental health, and feeds into current initiatives on how best to improve current systems of support for people who face mental health problems. The figures on mental health are striking: every week, one in six adults suffers from some sort of mental health condition, such as anxiety, depression and suicide. Even more alarmingly, one in five has considered taking their own life at some point.

I am encouraged to see that the Government are taking the issue of mental health so seriously and as seriously as physical health. In my view, parity of esteem means far more than simply saying we value a person’s mental wellbeing. It must mean tackling mental health issues with the same energy and priority with which we tackle physical illness. It is about changing the experience for people who require help with mental health problems. In addition, we must aim to put the funding and training for mental health services on a par with those for physical health services.

Crucially, we must end what appears to be the criminalisation of mental health conditions. The tragic case of Olaseni Lewis highlighted for many how quickly the police can become involved in mental health situations in a way that they perhaps do not in physical health cases. Indeed, the Metropolitan police force received a phone call relating to mental health every five minutes last year, an escalating level of demand which they have said could be caused by NHS services struggling to cope. The number of calls handled by the Metropolitan police in which someone was concerned about mental health hit a record 115,000 in the past year—on average 315 a day, or about 13 an hour.

In some cases, ill people struggling to find help have even committed crimes to obtain treatment, believing that that was the best way to get access to mental health services. The Met also expects to use powers to detain under section 136 of the Mental Health Act 1983 more often. Data from health partners in my own area of Greater Manchester indicate that around 1,000 people each year are detained under section 136.

However, some really good initiatives are being rolled out. I wish to highlight an initiative from my own force in Greater Manchester. It has collaborated with Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust to provide a training programme for staff that improves the understanding of mental health. For the past 12 months, staff and officers at Greater Manchester police have received comprehensive mental health training, delivered by mental health professionals. The scheme was originally designed for staff in the custody offices where people are detained, but I am delighted to report that it has proved so successful that it has now been incorporated in the training requirements for response officers, police community support officers and special constables. The eventual aim is that all workers complete the sessions.

The concept of parity of esteem, and indeed the wider issue of highlighting the importance of mental health, is especially vital, as we know, for young people. Some 75% of all chronic mental health problems start before the age of 18, yet currently only a quarter of children and teenagers under 15 with mental health problems get the help they need from public services. Since January 2013, there have been 17 deaths of patients under the care of young people’s mental health services. I know that the Government regard patient safety as a key priority, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published national guidance on learning from deaths last year to improve the way the NHS investigates and learns from in-patient deaths and to prevent future tragedies. I also welcome the £25 million of investment to support mental health patients so that we can achieve what we want, which is a zero suicide ambition.

I wish to speak to clause 12, which covers police-worn body cameras. That is already becoming standard practice in Greater Manchester. GMP has the largest force of officers outside London using body cameras, with more than 3,000 staff equipped with video recording devices. The Crown Prosecution Service has endorsed the equipment as a critical piece of technology not only in reducing violence, but—and this is key for this debate—in improving transparency. As the evidence suggests, there is merit in applying this measure across England and Wales. Body cameras have dramatically reduced the number of complaints made against police officers. During a trial period of their use, complaints dropped by 93%. It is because of that record that I believe body cameras will be an effective tool not only in assisting on-duty hospital staff, but in instilling those important patient safeguards.

There are good measures in the Bill which, coupled with the duties of the “responsible person”, will make this a very important piece of legislation. I am very pleased to support it and wish it well on its passage through this House.

10.17 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Let me start by congratulating my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), on piloting this piece of legislation through the occasionally shark-infested waters of the private Member’s Bill process. He has
done a very good job in getting the Bill to this stage. It is a particular pleasure to support it because, of course, it was the terrible suffering of a Croydon resident, one of his constituents, that inspired and motivated him to bring forward this very important piece of legislation in the first place.

This Bill, which I hope shortly will become an Act, does a very important thing in emphasising that physical force in a mental health context should be used as an absolute last resort and only after very careful thought and with great restraint, which, clearly, was not the case in the tragic death of Seni Lewis. I have been encouraged by the declining use of police custody suites as places of safety under the Mental Health Act; it has roughly halved over the past five or six years, which is a very welcome trend. I would like to see that reduced to zero.

The hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) also made a very important point when she said that the use of any sort of physical force in a mental health environment is a symptom of failure. No mental health case should ever be allowed to progress to the point where physical intervention is required, although it may sometimes be unavoidable. Therefore, an emphasis on prevention, early intervention and treatment long before any physical intervention is extremely important. I am pleased that the Government are spending more money in this area. The more we can do to make sure that patients are treated well before things escalate, the better the system will be.

The Bill as amended for our consideration today is a very good Bill. I strongly support it and look forward to voting for it shortly. However, I have a couple of comments and questions that I hope the hon. Member for Croydon North and the Minister might be able to comment on and answer. My first question relates to clause 3, which is about the requirement to publish a policy on the use of force. It requires “the responsible person” to publish a policy, but as far as I can see there is no prescription as to the contours or limits imposed on that policy. For example, one might have expected to see a requirement in the Bill that any such policy limits the use of force to reasonable force. That may be done in regulations, or perhaps there was another reason it was not considered appropriate to put it in the Bill, but one might have expected some explicit statement limiting force to reasonable force. I would be interested to hear from the hon. Gentleman and the Minister why that does not appear in the Bill.

My second point relates to clause 5 on training, about which I have two questions. The first concerns subsection (2)(c) on “showing respect for diversity in general”.

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman could amplify a little what that means in practice. I would have expected a requirement that everyone should be treated equally, regardless of their background. Perhaps that is what he means, but I am not sure whether “showing respect for diversity” quite conveys that meaning. I would be interested to hear his and the Minister’s comments on that.

My other question relates to subsection (5) on refresher training, in which it specifies should take place “at regular intervals”. I wonder whether regular intervals could specify what is meant by “regular intervals”. Annually would be a sensible degree of regularity, but if someone was not being true to the spirit of the Bill, they might interpret “regular” as once every 10 years, which clearly would not be frequent enough. I would be interested to hear the hon. Gentleman’s and the Minister’s views on what is suitable regularity and how that will be enforced. My view is that such training should be annually or at least once every two years.

Jackie Doyle-Price: I appreciate the spirit in which my hon. Friend is making these points. We do not want to be too prescriptive by putting in particular timings on how often the training should be, because obviously that depends very much on the context of the facility and how much wider training there is. At the same time, however, we want to be very explicit that it is regular training so that there is no excuse for staff not being properly informed about best practice in this area.

Chris Philp: I thank the Minister for her helpful intervention. Of course, I entirely sympathise with the point that Parliament should not impose unduly onerous requirements on already very busy and possibly, in some cases, overstretched mental health units, but I am concerned to make sure that we have not left a little loophole that might, perhaps inadvertently, end up being exploited so that training is not being given the degree of regularity that perhaps the House intends.

My final point of detail is on clause 6(10), which specifies the “relevant characteristics” of a patient. My hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) questioned whether we need to record those “relevant characteristics”, which are listed in quite some detail. If we are going to do so, and any inference is to be drawn from those characteristics in future, it is important to measure them against the same characteristics for the whole population treated in any particular mental health unit. If we are going to say, for example, that X% of people who have been subject to this procedure have a particular gender, sexual orientation, religion or ethnicity, then before drawing any inference from that, it is important to compare that statistic with the proportion of people in the unit with the same characteristic. One needs to use those statistics with of careful thought to make sure that inappropriate or inaccurate inferences do not end up being drawn.

I am, like my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley, a great supporter of the use of body-worn cameras, which are a great innovation. They have been responsible for a huge reduction in the number of complaints against police officers, because the officer is aware that the camera is being worn and recording—that, I am sure, has some moderating influence—and the person the officer is dealing with is aware of the same thing. I am sure that that has also reduced the number of vexatious complaints against the police. It is a very welcome move.

I was not present for the lengthy debate that my hon. Friend mentioned about whether a failure to wear a body-worn camera might be considered unlawful in the light of clause 12. Personally, I draw comfort from subsection (4), which appears to say expressly that there is not criminal liability. However, I will certainly follow his advice and refer to the report of the previous proceedings on that point. In general, the use of body-worn cameras when the police are dealing with mental health cases is extremely welcome and will, I am sure, assist with the problems that have existed in this regard.
I reiterate my very warm congratulations to my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Croydon North, for his tireless work in this area. I am sure that not just the London Borough of Croydon but the whole House and the whole country are grateful for his work.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on this Bill, which I support. I have two concerns that I raised on Report, one of which relates to training, which was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Chris Philp). The promoter of the Bill dealt with those admirably on Report, as he has throughout the progress of the Bill, and that certainly settled my concerns.

Of course, we will have other concerns. We all know that legislating in this place is one thing, but ensuring the enforcement of that legislation is another. There are areas—social care and others—where we all have questions to ask ourselves about enforcement of stuff that gets through this House. However, I know that this Bill is sound, and it puts this country in the best place in the world for legislation on this area. I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon North on what he has been doing. I know that he will be as doughty on ensuring that we have proper enforcement as he has been in promoting the Bill.

I echo the words of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger): this is a fantastic example of where a truly dreadful, appalling incident in an hon. Member’s constituency has provoked questions and led to an investigation, to thought, and ultimately to legislation. That is the purpose of private Members’ Bills, which, if properly scrutinised and if proper time is given, can really have a positive impact for our constituents. A dreadful incident has hopefully produced, via the work of the hon. Gentleman, a lasting legacy. I congratulate him once again on this Bill. I wish Seni’s law, as I hope it will soon become, Godspeed in its remaining stages.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Jeremy Quin). I echo many of the points that have been raised by colleagues today and in the debate three weeks ago, at which I was present although unfortunately did not get the opportunity to speak.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed) on the work he has done and the success he has had in gaining support not only across the House, but from Government, for this Bill, which I think we all agree is incredibly important.

I fully respect the intentions behind the Bill and the potential impact it could have for families affected by mental health. I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman’s endeavour to honour Seni Lewis’s memory in this way. I understand that Seni’s law, as the Bill is known, is personally important to the Lewis family, who have campaigned tirelessly on this issue with considerable success. These are important proposals for people in all our constituencies, and particularly those who have a family member or relative suffering with mental health issues. They need to know that the mental health units that their loved ones are in are in the care of are providing a safe and secure environment. That is a basic and fundamental right and expectation.

Around 9,000 people are restrained in mental health settings a year in England. The Bill is a significant piece of legislation, as it will serve as an important reform of the way in which we treat those detained under the Mental Health Act. It also represents significant progression in this area. It is about ensuring trust and accountability in the mental health system—something that tragic case studies have sadly shown is not always in place. I think every Member in the Chamber today would like to see a reduction in the use of force, and the Bill will help to provide that reduction.

However, while targets are all well and good, in certain circumstances—for example, when a patient is violent—the people caring for a patient might need to be able to protect themselves from harm and might have to resort to some form of force to do so. Assuming that use of force is a last resort, proportionate and does not risk the patient’s health, it is reasonable that they are afforded that protection. I appreciate that this is a delicate area, but it is important that clarity is provided in the published policies and that balance is sought.

I think it is fair to say that we cannot foresee every violent and threatening situation that may arise. Clearly we want a reduction in the use of force, and we can question the frequency of its use, but we must also consider a mental health carer who may find themselves attacked by a patient who may not understand what they are doing. We do not want to put people off undertaking this important role, for fear of prosecution. While these are obviously courses of action that we hope will never be needed, it is impossible to rule out situations arising in which one of them is a necessary last resort, in the best interests of both patient and carer.

Mind, the mental health charity, which does such important work in this area, makes a useful contribution to this consideration, saying:

“Healthcare staff and police do a challenging job and sometimes need to make difficult decisions very quickly. Often they use force to control someone’s behaviour, which can include physically restraining someone against their will, injecting them with medication and using seclusion to confine and isolate someone on the ward. For the person in crisis, this can be humiliating, traumatising and even life-threatening.”

A balance must be found in the interests of the wellbeing and safety of all of those involved.

The Bill complements the real focus we have seen from this Government on mental health, and in particular the treatment, priority, stigma and people costs of mental health matters. In October 2017, the Prime Minister announced that the Government would embark on a comprehensive review of the Mental Health Act, with a final report later this year. I am encouraged that the review will examine existing practices and address the disproportionately high rate of detention of people from ethnic minorities. As a country, we have taken progressive steps to improve the mental health sector, and the Bill is another step in the right direction. The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care summed it up pretty well in Committee when she said:

“Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Bill is that it enshrines accountability for ensuring that any institution fulfils its responsibilities. The buck needs to stop somewhere, and it is
important that happens with someone at board level.”—[Official Report, Mental Health Units (Use of Force) Public Bill Committee, 28 March 2018; c. 7.]

I wholeheartedly agree with that sentiment, so I am pleased to support the Bill today.

10.33 am

Mr Steve Reed (Croydon North) (Lab/Co-op): I would like to make a few concluding remarks. I have already spoken on the Bill, so I am grateful for this opportunity but do not intend to speak at length.

Perhaps I could start by acknowledging the presence in the Chamber of Seni’s parents, Aji and Conrad Lewis—we are delighted and proud to have them here—and also Marcia Rigg, who lost her brother Sean in very similar circumstances. Although the Bill is called Seni’s law, in honour of Seni, it has affected many people beyond Seni who have lost their lives or been injured simply because they were unwell, and the purpose of the Bill is to make sure that that cannot happen again.

This week we have marked the 70th anniversary of the national health service—one of the greatest things this House has ever created. What better way to celebrate that occasion than by giving the NHS a birthday present to make it even better, creating some of the best protections anywhere in the world for people with mental ill health? That is a wonderful way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of an institution that everybody in this country is so proud of.

My thanks go to the many people who have had a hand in the Bill, from the Minister to Members on both sides of the House, but most of all to the families who have led the campaign to get this law on the statute book. I cannot put it better than Seni’s father, Conrad, did three weeks ago, when we concluded the Report stage of the Bill. We were standing outside in the Members’ Lobby and somebody came up to Conrad and asked him, “How do you feel about today?” He said, “I bear a burden that I will have to carry for the rest of my life. It is a burden I wouldn’t wish on my worst enemy, and I don’t want any other parent to have to carry that burden.” This is our chance to make mental health services safe and equal for everyone. I am confident that the House will seize that chance, and in doing so, we will create a lasting and proud legacy for Seni Lewis.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

10.36 am

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), who has done great work on his private Member’s Bill.

I am grateful to Members from across the House for giving clear cross-party support to this Bill, which is small but nevertheless important. There are a number of people I would like to thank. I particularly want to thank the Clerks of the Public Bill Office, who have helped me through every stage of the process to get the Bill to Third Reading. As we know, it can be difficult to get a private Member’s Bill to this stage, and their support has been so helpful. I would also like to thank the Ministry of Justice team for all their support and information, and all Members of the House, particularly those from the Opposition, who have supported the Bill and who recognise the important difference that this will make in prisons up and down the country. In particular, the Bill will make a great difference for prison officers, who do such sterling work under very difficult circumstances.

Members may know that I inherited this Bill, so I want to put on record my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) for her previous work in championing the Bill and for trusting me with the responsibility of ensuring its safe passage. I hope I have repaid her confidence. I also want to acknowledge the groundbreaking work of my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) in steering the original Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012 through Parliament. It could be argued that because we are revisiting the 2012 Act only six years later, it was in some way deficient, but nothing could be further from the truth. The 2012 Act was an important and far-sighted contribution to the fight against the scourge of illicit mobile phones in prisons.

Figures provide a stark illustration of the scale of the problem. In 2011, just a year before the 2012 Act was introduced, about 7,000 illicit mobile phones and SIM cards were found in prisons in England and Wales. By 2016, that figure was nearly 20,000. Last year, it had risen to 23,636 mobile phones and SIM cards.

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Lady on how far the Bill has progressed so far. Last night I was talking to some mums whose young people had been caught up in crime, and they were horrified to tell me that people are using mobile phones to continue criminal activities in jail, and to continue to hold in their thrall the young people they have groomed. Does the hon. Lady share my concern that that is allowed to continue?
**Maria Caulfield:** The hon. Lady is quite right, and I will go on to explain how mobile phones are used to continue crime in our prison service. To reiterate, last year 23,656 mobile phones were found in our prisons, which is nearly 65 a day. In my constituency, 184 mobile phones and 80 SIM cards were found at HMP Lewes last year, and having visited the prison regularly and met prison officers and the governor, I have heard at first hand the implications of that. As the hon. Lady pointed out, illegal mobile phones present a serious risk to the security of our prisons, as well as to public safety. Mobile phones in prisons are used for a range of criminal purposes, including commissioning serious violence, harassing victims, and continuing involvement in extremist activity and organised crime. Access to mobile phones is strongly associated with drug supplies and violence in our prisons, so it is a serious problem.

It might be argued that the Prison Service should be better at stopping mobiles entering our prisons in the first place, but as the previous Justice Secretary made clear in a speech to Reform in December last year, technological advances have been harnessed by some manufacturers with the clear intention of circumventing prison security measures. Technological advances have made it possible to manufacture phones so small, and containing so little metal, that they can be concealed internally and are difficult to detect with existing screening machines. Phones have been marketed as “beat the BOSS”, which refers to the body orifice security scanner that is in use in our prison receptions.

However, just as technology can be harnessed for illicit ends, we can also enlist its support to improve the effectiveness of our response to the problem. Public communications providers such as mobile phone operators have been at the forefront of rapid technological developments in mobile communications. Only this week, we witnessed a mobile phone make its maiden speech during a Defence statement—there is no end to such possibilities.

**Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con):** My hon. Friend talks about a mobile phone making its maiden speech during a Defence statement, but does she recall that on Second Reading there was a rather bizarre interruption to my own speech—better known as a mobile phone fighting back against the Bill?

**Maria Caulfield:** My hon. Friend is quite right: mobile phones were trying to fight the Bill on Second Reading.

The changes in the Bill are designed directly to enlist the specialist knowledge, support and expertise of mobile phone operators to combat the use of illegal mobiles in our prisons, young offenders institutions, secure training centres and secure colleges. Importantly, and as I made clear at earlier stages of the Bill, it will ensure that a line of accountability for an operator’s activity is clearly set down in primary legislation.

Under the 2012 Act, public communications providers can become involved in interference activity in our prisons, but only when acting as agents of the governor or director who has been authorised to carry out that interference activity by the Secretary of State. By providing for them to be authorised directly, the Bill will enable them to bring their expertise directly to bear, at all times governed by a clear, legal framework. Existing safeguards in the 2012 Act will apply to authorised public communications providers, just as they already apply to authorised governors. Like an authorised governor, any public communications provider must comply with the directions given to them by the Secretary of State. Responsibility for deciding on the retention and disclosure of information obtained following interference activity conducted in a prison will continue to rest with the governor or director of that institution. That will apply even if the information has been obtained following interference activity conducted by an authorised public communications provider.

Two main questions have been raised during the progress of the Bill. The first came from residents in Lewes who were concerned that they might live so close to the prison that their mobile phones could be interfered with. I understand the fear that genuine customers could be erroneously disconnected from mobile phone networks if a phone is incorrectly identified as being used in a prison without authorisation. However, Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service will calibrate and test its approach, including any technological process and infrastructure, with mobile phone network operators and Ofcom, to ensure that only those handsets that are used in a prison without authorisation are identified and stopped from working.

The second concern raised by Members concerns the lack of genuine contact between prisoners and their families. Conservative Members who are part of the Strengthening Families programme have identified through the Lord Farmer review that maintaining contact between prisoners and their family members is crucial to reducing reoffending. Indeed, by maintaining family contact, reoffending rates can be reduced by something like 38%. It is important that genuine contact with their families is maintained for prisoners, but that does not mean that they need mobile phones. The Government have made great efforts to tackle this issue, and increasing legitimate access to phones, and encouraging prisoners to have more contact with their families, is important and part of the Government’s overall objective to improve rehabilitation.

The deployment of in-cell telephony to 14 prisons has been completed, and will make more calls accessible. Tariffs have also been reduced at those sites to make calls more affordable, and six more prisons will have in-cell telephony deployed by the end of July. In-cell telephony gives prisoners much greater opportunity to maintain contact with their families, as it is not affected by time out of cell, or a lack of privacy.

I have one final point before I invite the House to give the Bill a Third Reading. This Bill is not tied to any one technical solution, but instead it sets out the legal framework to enable more direct and independent involvement by authorised public communications providers. That approach should provide an element of cover against further and rapid technological advances in the mobile phone communications sphere—advances that are almost certain to happen, given the speed with which this high-tech field has developed. With that, I commend the Bill to the House.

10.47 am

**Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab):** This welcome Bill goes some way to addressing the issues surrounding mobile phones in prison, and as my hon. Friend the
Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said, evidence has shown time and again that mobile phones have been smuggled into prison for use by inmates, often to enable them to engage in further illicit activity. They are used illicitly to order drugs, harass victims, and organise crime, both inside and outside the prison. The use of mobile phones for such activities is completely unacceptable, but figures indicate that the number of phones conveyed into prisons for use by inmates is increasing.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) gave some figures, and I shall present some others that show a similar trend. In 2013, there were around 7,500 reported incidences of mobile phones and SIM cards being found in prison, but by 2015 that figure had increased to nearly 17,000. Mobile phone use in prisons is a problem that needs tackling, and the Bill is a welcome step forward. I might question whether Back Benchers should be driving forward legislation to tackle illegal prison activity, rather than the Government, but nevertheless the ability to interfere with wireless telegraphy and to disrupt mobile phone use in a designated, specified area could have a significant impact in reducing the use of mobile phones and, subsequently, any further illegal activity through their use.

Although the Bill goes some way to addressing organised violence and drugs in prisons, it cannot be seen as a panacea to end the problems in our prisons. Violence, drugs, and further crime are not helped by the Government’s treatment of our prisons system, which has produced an environment that allows them to flourish. The Government’s decision to slash prison budgets, axe prison officers and neglect our prisons has led to overcrowding and violence. With nearly 4,000 fewer frontline prison officers than in 2010, searches are increasingly difficult and no amount of action on wireless telegraphy can replace the eyes and ears of staff on the ground. Without those staff and proper action to address overcrowding, mobile phones will continue to find a way in, drugs will carry on being smuggled through, and prison violence may continue.

10.49 am

Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con): I am delighted to be called so early in this debate. I would like to put on record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for all her work in driving the Bill forward and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey), who put a lot of work into the Bill.

As an MP with three prisons in my constituency, I have a particular interest in the Bill and I am pleased to be here to support it. It tackles one of the main security and safety threats currently facing our prisons: the illicit use of mobile phones, which can pose serious risks to the security and safety of many prisons. I would also like to put on record my thanks to the governors at HMP Ashfield, HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Leyhill for their insights into this matter and their continuing support to engage with both me as the local MP and the Government to make progress on these issues. I think we have already seen early on in this debate that there is agreement that action is needed. We have heard about the astonishing increase in the number of illicit phones and SIM cards being recovered in our prisons: 20,000 in 2016 and more than 23,500 in 2017. It is clear that action needs to be taken.

Ilicit mobile phones deserve no place in our prisons. They may be used by prisoners to contact their families but they are also a potential source of revenue, such as when they are used to maintain communications with crime networks and drug smugglers outside prisons. They destabilise and undermine the safety of prisons, and help to support ongoing criminality and the illicit economy inside prisons. Mobile phones and SIM cards are worth a lot of money in prisons, whether sold or rented. That can fuel a vicious circle of debt, violence and reoffending. Prisoners with access to the internet and social media can spread sensitive information about the prison themselves. They can intimidate and harass prison staff, as well as witnesses and victims outside prison. If prisoners are able to continue criminal behaviour inside prison, the point made to me a number of times is that there is much less incentive for rehabilitation.

When discussing this matter with the governors in south Gloucestershire, they have stated that, although this is not as big an issue for our three prisons as it may be in other prisons, they all acknowledge that the proliferation of illicit phones is a real and current problem because of the changing and evolving nature of technology, and that the low numbers of contraband in our area may grow in the future. All three governors are very clear that the measures to disrupt technology and disrupt the illicit use of mobile phones are greatly welcome.

I know the Minister and the Government are already doing a lot of work to tackle this issue. We have been investing in further technology, such as metal detectors, body scanners and detection poles, which already help to detect some contraband smuggling. I am pleased we are putting ahead with measures to make it easier for prisoners to access phones in their cells—this has been mentioned already—where access is currently limited in a number of prisons. This helps prisoners to feel much more comfortable having private conservations with their families, and reduces the demand and need for illicit mobile phones which can then go on to be used for other purposes. In-cell telephones will help to stop the demand for illicit phones. In the prisons in south Gloucestershire where we already have this technology, this has helped to stem the flow of illegal handsets. Prisoners are able to keep in touch with their family and loved ones, while the prison staff are allowed to monitor the calls if it is felt to be necessary.

The measures the Government are already undertaking will be complemented by the measures proposed in the Bill. Although there are currently laws in place enabling prison governors to interfere with wireless telegraphy to block phone signals, the Bill will go further and will help to address the problem by allowing communication providers to directly and independently take action to interfere with the signal to disrupt this unlawful use of mobile phones in prisons. By giving direct authority to mobile phone network operators to act on these issues, we will be utilising their key specialist knowledge to help to combat criminality in these institutions.

I echo the concerns we have heard in previous debates, which were repeated by my local governors, about the impact that blocking mobile signals could have on surrounding local residents and businesses. For example, the Bristol and Bath cycle path runs right by the wall of HMP Ashfield. The last thing we want is for signals to...
be blocked or interfered with. We need to ensure that the technology is properly targeted so that people nearby are not affected.

I welcome the comments made about ensuring that any technology and infrastructure measures will be properly calibrated and tested to make sure that only the illicit use of mobile phones is targeted. It would perhaps be helpful to have an understanding of where that will be tested, whether in prisons around the country or off site. My governors have asked for early notice about whether they will be involved.

In conclusion, the prison governors in South Gloucestershire welcome the Bill’s proposed changes. They welcome anything that will help them to address the issues and risks associated with illicit technology. I support this much-needed Bill, which will support the work of governors in helping to keep our prisons and communities safe.

10.56 am

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) and, for those of us who are truly fascinated by what goes on inside prisons, to hear what is going on in Gloucestershire.

Illicit phone use in prison is not new. I am sure hon. Members across the House are familiar with the 1969 version of the film “The Italian Job”. Think of the scene where Mr Bridger—I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker, this may not be in order, but I am going to talk about lavatories—goes to use his lavatory. I am sure hon. Members are with me. He uses that as an excuse to use his illicit telephone. From the prison lavatory, he runs a complex criminal network involving drugs, gangland violence and all sorts of other dreadful things we still worry about today.

Mr Bridger, a fictional character played so well by Noël Coward, was able to do that because he had access to a telephone. Now, of course, telephone use in prisons is ubiquitous. One does not have to be a criminal with the cunning or intelligence of Mr Bridger to have access to one’s entire network of contacts outside prison. Almost all prisoners, I would imagine, have had access to a mobile phone and, in my experience of the Prison Service, not just one. It is a bit like dealing with teenagers at boarding schools. My middle sister, whose day job it is to control them, tells me that, when she asks them to hand in their mobile phones at night, she then has to say, “And the other one.” And then she says, “And the other one, please.” I think the same is true in prisons.

There is no doubt that in recent years we have faced new security challenges in our prisons, not least new psychoactive substances which have been devastating for the Prison Service. On that note, it is a pleasure to follow all the speeches that have been made so far on this important but careful Bill. However, it is important that Her Majesty’s loyal Opposition recognise the difficulties the Government have faced in trying to deal with new psychoactive substances in prisons. I hear what they say, and indeed I have spoken many times myself, about the difficulties with reductions in staffing, but the Government need to be given some credit for the enormous efforts that have been made to increase prison officer numbers. I believe the Government are currently on track with the new target of increasing prison officer numbers by 2,500 new officers this year. That will be a real help to improving security in our prisons.

It was a pleasure to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) talk about the importance of family ties, which were one of the difficulties raised during the Bill’s earlier stages. She spoke passionately, as I do frequently, about the Farmer review. It is important that we view in-cell telephony not as being nice for prisoners to have, but from the other side of the telescope. What are we all trying to do is protect victims, not prisoners. Anything that we can do to reduce reoffending—my hon. Friend said that it has been proven that maintaining family ties helps to reduce reoffending by 38%—is worth that. That is not because we love prisoners or what they have done, but because we care that they will not do it again.

It is also important to mention prisoners’ children. One of the worst statistics that we bandy around from the prison world is that a judge sentencing somebody to prison today is sentencing two thirds of their children to a prison sentence in turn. That is an appalling thought. If we are genuinely interested in trying to help the most vulnerable, difficult-to-help parts of society—the parts that others cannot reach—we have to deal with that statistic. If, by keeping family contact going and reducing reoffending, we can play some small part in the non-creation of an underclass of people who will themselves offend, we must do everything we can to do that. If that involves in-cell telephony, so be it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate detailed the many difficulties that can ensue from a large internal and external drug-trafficking market, which can be kept going by mobile telephony, so it is clear why it is important to stop mobile telephony within prisons as much as possible. We have known for some time that we would not all concentrate more in meetings, and indeed, in this Chamber, were it possible to turn off our mobile phone signal from time to time, and certainly, as a mother of teenagers, I would occasionally love the ability to turn off more than the wi-fi—which of course, they know how to turn back on—and to put a “cordon sanitaire” around whatever we might need to.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I am a parent of teenagers myself. I do not understand this technology in the Bill—I am hoping that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) will explain it to me when I give my speech—but I am interested to know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) thinks that this technology could be utilised in the home to allow for better productivity from our children.

Victoria Prentis: The technology has been there for a long time. Governors have had the ability to turn off individual non-authorised mobile phones, although they have had to jump through very difficult hoops to do so. I am sure that we could extend that to our homes, but I think we would need another private Member’s Bill to do so.
This Bill gives the Secretary of State power, in addition to the existing powers, which are very difficult to use, to turn off much wider groups of mobile telephones. From time to time, this may of course upset prison staff, who may have to go to a special area of the prison to use their mobiles. I am dreadful—my children tell me off for being addicted to my mobile—but it may assist with the general rehabilitative nature of life in the prison if staff are indeed encouraged to talk to prisoners.

As the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) made clear, the Bill is not enough to deal with the problem on its own. The Government have also invested £2 million in detection equipment for mobiles. There will be handheld detectors and portable detection rods, which will be used as people enter the prison, for example, and I am sure that those will be helpful, too. What is exciting about the Bill is that it is a simple measure that not only will deal with a specific problem, but is part of a wider package of Government reform of the prison system, which I know that this Minister and the Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice are absolutely devoted to taking forward.

The Bill on its own will not make our prisons rehabilitative, particularly safe or crime-free zones overnight, but it will certainly help, and it has been an honour for me to play a small part in its inception.

11.4 am

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) in supporting this very important private Member’s Bill, and let me repeat the congratulations that have been expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who has shown such deftness in guiding this private Member’s Bill this far. She has done a fantastic job and I strongly congratulate her on her fantastic work. This private Member’s Bill is incredibly important, because the widespread—I am afraid that it is widespread—use of mobile phones in our prison estate is causing very serious problems. I will use three cases to illustrate exactly how serious these problems are, because individual cases are always more powerful than simply quoting statistics.

The first case is that of Shaun Walmisley, 30 years old, who had been imprisoned in HMP Liverpool for a particularly brutal gangland murder. This man was a high-level criminal, running criminal gangs, and had murdered one of his criminal associates. He engineered a hospital appointment by feigning illness and, over the course of three months, used a mobile phone that he had illicitly obtained in prison to plan his escape. During his second hospital appointment, he was sprung out of custody by masked men brandishing machine guns in an episode that police say had been planned over a period of three months, using the mobile phone that he illicitly had. If measures such as those in the Bill had been in place, it would have been impossible for Shaun Walmisley to plan and execute his escape, and the prison guards who were accompanying him to the hospital—Aintree University Hospital in Liverpool—would not have faced machine gun-wielding thugs as they escorted the prisoner.

Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con): I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on progressing this Bill so well. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) mentions, a lot has been said about making calls, but I think the point he is making is that, with rapidly advancing technology, the problem is much broader because it is about access to such things as the internet and applications, which are aiding criminals in prisons, and we need to stamp that out as well.

Chris Philp: My hon. Friend makes an extremely good point: this is about not just voice calls, but data. The case studies that I am mentioning illustrate that the use of mobile phones in prisons is not a harmless activity that we perhaps frown upon, but to some degree, can turn a blind eye to. In fact, what we are seeing is the organisation of very serious criminal activity being facilitated by mobile phones. A moment ago, I mentioned an escape involving machine gun-toting masked men.

A second example is that of Imran Bashir, who was incarcerated in HMP Garth in Lancashire. He was using a mobile phone in that prison to co-ordinate a widespread heroin-smuggling and heroin-dealing network, bringing untold misery to hundreds of people who were buying and taking heroin. He was running this criminal enterprise via a series of conference calls, which he had organised and was participating in using his mobile phone. My hon. Friend mentioned the use of internet and data. This man was using conference call facilities to organise his criminal network. Had measures such as those in the Bill been in place, it would have been impossible for him to do that.

A third example is that of convicted armed robber Craig Hickinbottom, aged 65. He was serving a prison sentence but was using a mobile phone that was in his possession to run a very well-organised smuggling network, which was bringing prohibited items into not just his prison, but several prisons in Scotland and the north-west. He was only uncovered when cameras on the prison perimeter, which were being used to film wildlife—that might have been an elaborate cover by the authorities—spotted drones flying over the prison walls carrying prohibited material, some of which was suspended on fishing line.

The subsequent investigation revealed that Craig Hickinbottom had been co-ordinating a vast smuggling network over many prisons. More than £1 million-worth of banned material had been smuggled in, including drugs, mobile phones, SIM cards, offensive weapons, a screwdriver—I assume that it was intended to be used as a weapon—a Freeview box and a remote control. He was eventually convicted and given a new prison sentence. All that nefarious activity was facilitated by his having a mobile phone.

The prohibition of mobile phones in prison is no minor matter. I have given just three examples of extraordinarily serious criminal activity being organised and orchestrated using mobile phones. Taking mobile phones out of our prisons will prevent that serious criminal activity. The Bill therefore has my complete support.

I have two questions, either for my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes or for the Minister—if he does not intend to make a speech, I will happily take an intervention. My first question relates to clause 1(2), which states:

“The Secretary of State may authorise a public communications provider to interfere with wireless telegraphy.”
The word “authorise” indicates that a provider can be permitted to do that, but can they be compelled? Can the Secretary of State actually require a provider to jam the signal or in some other way prevent mobile communications? The Secretary of State may authorise it, but what if the provider declines to act? Does the word “authorise” give the Secretary of State enough power? Should it not be replaced with “compel”? I see that the Minister is tempted to intervene, but he is indicating—with extraordinarily dextrous hand signals—that he will return to that point in due course.

My second question does not relate directly to the legislation, but it touches on it. The Bill relates to public communications providers, but is it possible to install equipment in prisons to allow the signal to be jammed independently of the providers? Could the Prison Service bring a portable device into a prison in order to jam the signal?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): The answer is yes. We absolutely can take our own devices into prisons in order to do that independently of a mobile phone company.

Chris Philp: I am delighted to hear that. Could the Minister elaborate further by commenting on how frequently that is done?

Rory Stewart: There are some technological limitations, because the mobile phone company transmits at different frequencies and at different powers. If we were to prevent the use of mobile phones through our own device, we would have to anticipate the frequency and the nature of the transmission. That is what we have done in the past, but it is not always technologically adequate, and that is the reason for the Bill.

Chris Philp: I thank the Minister for that thorough answer. I look forward to hearing his comments in due course on whether the word “compel” might be more appropriate than “authorise”.

I strongly support the removal of mobile phones from our prison estate and therefore support the Bill. I strongly encourage the Minister to step up the level of physical searches in prisons. Hopefully he will comment on that too. It is a pleasure to support the Bill, and an even greater pleasure to support my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes.

11.14 am

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): It is an honour to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp). I was interested to hear him describe the number of different criminal uses of mobile phones in prison. There are no prisons in my constituency, but many of my constituents are prison officers based at HMP Dartmoor, one of the most beautiful prisons in the country, which is in the constituency of my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox).

I thank my fabulous hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for bringing forward the Bill. Would she like to intervene to explain a little further how the technology will actually work? I am interested to hear what tech will be used.
The purpose of the Bill is to help people not to reoffend, but it is also to help prison officers to do their job effectively. I therefore welcome the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes has introduced the Bill and wish it safe passage.

11.20 am

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): As I have listened to the speeches that have been made so far this morning—mostly by Conservative Members—I have been struck by the length of time my colleagues have been spending on their mobile phones. I say that because it is important for the thousands, or millions, of people listening to the debate at home, and those in the Public Gallery, to recognise that the purpose of the Bill is not to punish prisoners for wanting to get in touch with their families or friends outside; the purpose of the Bill, which I fully support—like other Members, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for introducing it—is to improve the security and safety of our prisons, and, specifically, to make it harder for people to engage in criminal activity from behind bars.

As we have already heard from my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), nearly 50% of prisoners reoffend within a year. That is an appalling and sobering statistic, and we should all be very worried about it, not least because those are only the ones we catch within a year. Apart from the fact that reoffending ruins offenders’ lives, the lives of their families and the lives of the people against whom they offend, it costs the country north of £15 billion a year, so we need to tackle it. I know—and all other Conservative Members know, as I suspect, do most Opposition Members—how hard the prisons Minister is working, along with other Members of the Government, on the whole issue of prison reform, and on ensuring that we can rehabilitate our prisoners more effectively.

As we have already heard, this is, in some ways, quite a technical Bill. It enables the Secretary of State to authorise mobile phone operators themselves to act quickly and effectively to disturb the signals and operation of phones in our prisons. In this place we often talk of big aims and grandiose ambitions, and use soaring rhetoric, but it is often small, technical adjustments that have some of the biggest, most far-reaching consequences, which is another reason why I support the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis)—a dear friend, not just an honourable one—mentioned loving prisoners and their families. I think that we do love prisoners and their families. We want to give them the best possible opportunity not to be drawn into criminal activity behind bars, but to put their lives back on track. That should accompany all the other reforms that the Government are trying to introduce, such as the recruitment of additional prison officers, additional funding and investment in prisons, and improved drug treatment.

We have heard from many Members about the use of technologies such as drones that are enabling mobile phones to be dropped into prisons. Let me press the Minister, and the Government, to ensure that we are dealing fully with all the different areas of legislation that can help this Bill to be effective. Also on today’s Order Paper is my Bill relating to psychoactive substances, a subject about which we have already heard this morning. Dealing with such substances is one way that could make my hon. Friend’s Bill more effective. Keeping drugs out of prisons and preventing mobile phones from being used illicitly constitutes another step towards sorting out the difficult problem of reoffending.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes again, because it is hard to get Members into the House on Fridays when most of them tend to be in their constituencies. It is testimony to the quality of the Bill, and the commitment that Conservative Members—including the Minister—and a number of Opposition Members have to it that so many are present today, and I think it gives an indication of the importance of what we are trying to do.

Let me end by saying this—[HON. MEMBERS: “More!”]

More? I do not want to test the indulgence of the House too much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Politicians spend a lot of time talking. We do that because it is our job, and because we are paid to advocate on behalf of our constituents. However, we must ensure that we talk with purpose, and with action in view. I am very happy to be here today—in fact, I think that this is the first Friday on which I have spoken in the House since being elected—because I know that this talking, not just by me but by other Members, will lead to concrete action to improve prisoners’ lives, and that is why I wholeheartedly support the Bill.

11.26 am

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), particularly as this is the first time he has spoken on a Friday.

Let me echo the words of other Members and thank my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for guiding this important Bill through the House. I also thank my right hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, for introducing the Bill last year.

We know how quickly technology can change and evolve. The first mobile phone that I purchased, probably about 20 years ago, looked a bit like a brick and weighed nearly as much, and had only a few hours’ worth of battery power. Mobile phones have come a long way. The new ones are lighter, smaller and more sophisticated. They do so much more than just make calls, and they tend to be much more durable.

Contraband is nothing new—it has been around as long as prisons have been in existence—but recent changes in mobile phone technology allow prisoners to connect easily with the outside world. As others have pointed out, that poses risks not just to guards and other prisoners, but to our communities. Victims of crime and the wider public expect those who are sentenced and serve their time “inside” not to have the means to contact others and continue the illegal activity for which they were imprisoned.

Disturbingly, as we have heard, tens of thousands of phones are confiscated in prisons each year. According to media reports, inmates are able to order drugs and other contraband in “Deliveroo” style on their phones, and products are delivered to cell windows by drones. It is therefore important for us, as a Government, to stay
ahead of the curve, and to equip our prison officers and governors with the powers that they need to disrupt a practice that is widespread and growing.

Just this year, a burglar who was serving time in Strangeways prison was caught using a mobile phone to send a text—I say this to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis)—as Mr Bridger communicated in “The Italian Job”. Further investigation of his cell by prison guards revealed two handsets and a host of other electronic items, including phone batteries, a charger, a SIM card and a keypad. I will not promote the brand of phone he was using by naming it, but it is marketed as the smallest fully functional mobile phone in the world, and can be purchased over the internet for as little as £23. What makes these phones a particular favourite of prison inmates is that they are small enough to be hidden, sometimes in a way not easily detectable by a search, and can often beat metal detectors as they have few metal components. This illicit use of mobile phones undermines the security and safety of other prisoners; it enables criminals to access the internet and gives them the ability to contact the outside world for illicit and questionable purposes.

I am reassured that the Government have already taken action to tackle this issue: £2 million has already been invested in detection equipment, and every prison in England and Wales is currently being equipped with technology such as portable detection poles. However, body scanners and detection poles are not enough on their own to combat this problem, as the evidence I have mentioned shows. This Bill addresses the need for mobile networks to have the powers to completely cut the signal from an inmate’s mobile phone device and, more impressively, locate a phone that is being used.

On Second Reading and in Committee, a number of key issues were raised, particularly around improving the availability of, and prisoners’ access to, lawful telephones in prison. This is important. A prisoner’s access to communication with their family is vital in reducing reoffending rates, as we have heard. Maintaining positive connections is important. For instance, research published by the Ministry of Justice last year reveals that prisoners who are visited by their families during their incarceration are 39% less likely to reoffend upon release. That family connection is key to cutting a prisoner’s cycle of self-harm and violence. Prisoners can already contact family members, for instance via Skype, and safeguards must be in place to ensure that these beneficial, supervised sessions are not affected as a result of this legislation.

I also appreciate that this is a matter of supply and demand. As the Howard League for Penal Reform has highlighted, one way to tackle the demand for mobile phones is by ensuring better access to telephones in prisons. It states:

“Ensuring prisoners can access reasonably private and affordable pay phones would have a significant impact on demand for mobile phones.”

As well as preventing reoffending, prisoners who have regular family contact are more stable while serving their sentences. That is why I am pleased that the Government are committed to providing legitimate ways for prisoners to contact friends and family, while tackling the use of illegal phones at source.

The use of mobile phones in prisons breaks down the metal and concrete barriers that were built to protect the very communities we represent. What is at stake is not just the safety of the public but the safety of our prison guards and governors. Although not a silver bullet for prison reform, this Bill will go a long way towards remedying the problems raised today. I again thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes for guiding this important piece of legislation through the House; I wish it well in its passage to becoming an Act of Parliament and commend it to the House.

11.33 am

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mary Robinson). I can add another 10 years to her; I first owned a mobile phone 30 years ago. Whether it was 20 or 30 years ago, however, we must remember that they were just phones then. They were not devices with apps and various other things; technology has changed so much and we need to ensure the legislation keeps up with that. I too commend my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for bringing forward this important Bill, which I believe will strengthen the safety and security of our prisons to the benefit of both prisoners and prison staff.

My hon. Friend was very descriptive in her speech, which effectively highlighted the issue this Bill aims to tackle. As she said, if technology is being used to breach the security of our prisons, there should be the capability to use technology to combat that criminality. If our statute book is to remain effective in the digital age, it is vital that legislation is regularly reviewed and that gaps are identified when they are created by the pace of technological advancement. New technology, such as smart phones and drones, presents a constant challenge to the security of prisons, so any additional support Parliament can give to Her Majesty’s Prison Service in tackling these issues should be welcomed across the House.

This is a simple Bill, but one designed to combat the mobile phones and SIM cards found across prison estates, of which there were 20,000 in 2016. I am sure that figure has increased considerably since. By enabling the Secretary of State directly to authorise network operators to cut off wireless telegraphy, we can not only greatly limit the illegal activities of prisoners inside prisons, preventing things such as organised riots and drug deals, but reduce illegal activity outside prison.

As we learned from the contributions made during the earlier stages of this Bill, legitimate contact between prisoners and their families provides stability to their prison experience, especially to those prisoners who may be at risk of self-harming, and can aid rehabilitation. It is therefore reassuring that Ministers have addressed the concerns raised on Second Reading and in Committee—concerns I share—and that legitimate contact will not now be affected by this Bill; we are grateful for that.

I am disappointed, however, that although this Bill extends to England, Wales and Scotland, in addition to making provision for its extension to the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, in practice it will apply only to England and Wales. I sincerely hope that once this legislation is passed Ministers will continue to work with the devolved Administrations to align the law in order to ensure that prisons across the United Kingdom are afforded the same level of security across the board.
Maria Caulfield: The offer was made to the Scottish Government to apply the Bill to Scotland. They have not taken it up, but the hope is that they may well do so in future.

Maggie Throup: I thank my hon. Friend for that clarification. The absence today of Scottish National party Members is notable and might suggest they are not as concerned as we are about the security of our prison officers and of prisoners who want to be rehabilitated.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): I would not want my hon. Friend inadvertently to besmirch the reputation of some of our hon. Members: there are Scottish Conservative Members of Parliament here; I have seen them today.

Maggie Throup: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I was looking across the Chamber at the SNP Benches, not behind me; I know that we have representation from the devolved nation of Scotland here today.

In summary, this is a well-considered Bill that will improve the security of our prisons for both prisoners and prison staff. It will also strike a blow to serious and organised crime by dramatically reducing the amount of illicit contact between prisoners and the outside world. I again commend my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes for the way in which she has navigated the Bill to this stage and I am pleased to offer it my full support today.

11.38 am

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a great pleasure to talk on this Bill, which I fully support. This issue first came to my attention when I was working at the Centre for Social Justice, where I was director of policy from 2012 to 2016. We wrote a report while I was there called “Drugs in Prison”, which looked at how we might remove these toxic and addictive substances from the prison estate. We wanted to examine how prisons could protect the public and punish offenders through the deprivation of their liberty, but could also help prisoners to rebuild their lives. This Bill contributes to all three of those work-streams. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on introducing it and my right hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on having started the whole process. It was also good to hear the hon. Member for Ashfield (Gloria De Piero) supporting the Bill; it is always a pleasure to be in the House when there is cross-party support for something that, as I believe to be the case here, contributes to the cause of social justice.

This is a series of measures that can protect the public. It is utterly unacceptable that people in prison should be able to continue their criminal operations from behind bars. At an earlier stage of the Bill, the Minister referred in true literary form to the passing of messages scribbled on silver through the bars of a prison in “The Man in the Iron Mask”. These days, it is possible not only to pass messages but to take orders on the internet, control our banking activities and really run our lives from our mobile phones. How many of us do not do that? We are failing to protect the public by failing to disrupt criminal activity in this way, and failing to deprive people of their liberty. So much activity can be conducted through mobile phones, and we will not be fulfilling what the public expect of a prison sentence if we continue to allow people unfettered access to the internet while in prison.

That said, I firmly take on board what my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) said about the Farmer review and the importance of allowing people to stay in touch with their families. That is unquestionably important. I have a number of young people in my constituency with parents in prison and, having spoken to their teachers, I know how important it is for them to be able to stay in touch with their fathers. However, this cannot be used as an excuse to give people in prison 24-hour access to the internet. The public would not expect that, and I am sure that people who have been sent to prison would not expect it either. There is a balance to be struck, and I believe that the powers in the Bill will give us the potential to do that.

That is of course only one part of the picture. Our research into drugs in prison at the Centre for Social Justice was headed up by a former prison governor from Liverpool, Alan Brown. He showed us an extraordinary number of ingenious ways in which people could bring illicit substances into prison, sometimes using mobile technology and sometimes not. I remember him describing how one prisoner had been found building a catapult out of rubber gloves. He had tied many yellow rubber gloves together and then propelled a heavy object connected to a fishing line from his cell window over a tree branch. It landed on the ground, and one of his counterparts out on the street attached a parcel of drugs to the fishing line, which was then reeled in. We also saw examples of drone activity, and I remember one former prisoner describing how he had cut a hole in the side of his mouth in order to create a pocket in which to smuggle drugs into prison. All these examples remind us just how ingenious our prison population is.

Maria Caulfield: I am hearing from prison officers that one of the most ingenious ways of smuggling drugs into prisons at the moment is to soak the pages of books and letters in drugs. The prisoners lick the drugs off later when they are back in their cells.

Alex Burghart: Edible books! That is extraordinary. I have not heard that example before.

There are many ingenious ways of bringing drugs into prisons, and we know how extraordinarily disruptive they are to prisoners’ lives. A large number of people take drugs for the first time in prison, and the amount of Spice—the recently criminalised new psychoactive substance—in prisons has rocketed in the past few years. That is damaging not only prisoners but prison officers, who often inhale the odourless fumes as they go around on their watch. These substances actively destroy people’s chances of rehabilitating when they are in prison. In many cases, they create or cement addictive behaviours, which then carry on when the person leaves prison, destroying their chances of being able to move into work. Being able to tackle telephony in prisons is one important way in which we can start to disrupt this trade and so give people in prison more hope that they will be able to turn their lives around on release.

11.45 am

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). He has made an excellent speech,
and I know that he comes to this issue with a lot of experience at the Centre for Social Justice. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on her hard work in taking the Bill forward, and also my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) on the work she did to initiate the Bill. The fact that it passed unamended in Committee reflects its simplicity and its importance, as well as the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes, and I hope she will see its passage through the House today.

The Bill is of particular interest to me as I have recently served as Parliamentary Private Secretary at the Ministry of Justice. I welcome its provisions, because I believe that giving the Secretary of State the power to authorise public communications providers to disrupt the unlawful use of mobile phones in prisons is an important public policy objective. These powers are in addition to those already on the statute book that allow prison governors to interfere with such mobile phone communications. I am pleased to support the Bill today. I believe that it will strengthen our prison system as well as meeting the challenges associated with advances in mobile technology and wider criminal activity. I echo the sentiment of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes that 13,000 mobile phones and 7,000 SIM cards being found in our prisons in 2016 was simply too many. That is why I commend her for bringing forward the Bill, and I am sure that it will find support on both sides of the House.

When I served at the Ministry of Justice, I was able to witness the use of mobile phones in prisons when I visited HMP Pentonville. I spoke to the governor, the deputy governor and prison staff there, and I was also able to speak to some of the prisoners, which enabled me to understand some of their motivations. I also understand the difficulty that prison officers have in curtailing the use of mobile phones in prisons. That is why the Bill is so important. The unlawful use of mobile phones in prisons undermines the safety and security of prisons and enables criminals to direct illegal activity from behind bars, including organising violence and drug smuggling. It also harms the rehabilitation process for prisoners, as we have heard from a number of speakers today.

Reoffending rates are still too high. This costs the economy around £15 billion a year, but it also means wasted talent and broken families. There are complex reasons for reoffending, and it is not solely down to the use of mobile phones in prisons, but there is no doubt that that can be a seriously contributory factor. Unfettered access to the internet can have a damaging impact on the rehabilitation process, through the glamorisation of life behind bars on sites such as Snapchat and Instagram, as well as through more sinister activities such as organising crime from within prisons and associating with former criminal networks. Prison officers have told me that such damage is most pronounced when they are attempting to break down the gang culture that pervades many of our prisons, and the cycle of violence that often comes with it. If a gang member on the inside remains in close contact—speaking daily—to those outside, and perhaps even continues his activities while in prison, how can we expect to break the cycle of bad behaviour and the gang culture? In order to change lives it is vital that we change the habits of prisoners and break their contact with their criminal fraternity.

Equally, for prisons to be at their most effective, it is important that they work as a true deterrent. In our modern society, where we depend so much on our mobile phones to manage our finances, order food, read the news and update social media, the loss of liberty on the inside should be a truly frightening prospect, entailing tangible disadvantages that are truly punitive. With the proliferation of mobile phones in prisons, being cut off from the outside world has essentially become completely irrelevant, and we need to reverse that process. That is why the Bill is so important.

In fact, the use of mobile phones in prisons is not only harmful to prisoners’ rehabilitation, it could also trigger other bad behaviours, for example encouraging prisoners to disregard authority and other prison rules. I fear that more videos watched on social media from inside prisons will simply make people less afraid of jail and diminish the impact that jail has as a deterrent.

Other hon. Members have reiterated the importance of ensuring that prisoners are able to stay in contact with family members so that they can maintain relationships and bring stability to their lives, especially after they leave prison. I am delighted that the Ministry of Justice is taking action to ensure that that is the case and that the Bill would not diminish that ability. For example, I am aware that prisons such as HMP Berwyn, a category C prison in Wales, already offers close to 24/7 access to PIN phones, so that prisoners can call their loved ones. As a result of such measures, the use of mobile phones will no longer be necessary.

I commend the Ministry of Justice and the Minister for ensuring that prisoners who are found with phones in prison are subject to increased sentences. For example, John Grimshaw, who was found with two handsets, a phone battery, a SIM card and keypad in his cell at HMP Manchester received a harsher sentence—I think it was an extra year. It is right that we continue to punish those in the prison system who are found with illicit mobile phones.

I support the Bill because it would set out a framework to allow the Government to future-proof the prison regime. As the fourth industrial revolution accelerates, technology that blocks signals and mobile phones in prisons will soon become more cost-effective and have more impact. Therefore, the regime created by this simple but effective Bill will be important to ensure that our prison regime is secure for the future. I hope that the Minister and the Secretary of State will work closely with telecommunications companies to ensure that they bring forward the right equipment and mobile phone detection software to ensure that we can protect prisons, to make them safe and to allow prisoners to be rehabilitated. I strongly support the Bill and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes on her hard work.

11.51 am

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) who, with his knowledge and campaigning on the fourth industrial revolution, brings much expertise on modern technology to the debate, as he demonstrated in his remarks.
It is also a pleasure to speak on Third Reading, having spoken on Second Reading and been on the Committee. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) on bringing the Bill this far, and I pay tribute to the work of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) who initiated the Bill. I am pleased that since I rose to speak I have not had another phone launch a fightback, as one did on Second Reading. Those of us in the Chamber suddenly discovered what the “Find My iPhone” noise sounded like, as it bleeped away on the Back Benches, interrupting our proceedings. Mobile phones can, however, be a great tool and a useful asset in modern life. Unfortunately, they are no longer just phones. They can be the equivalent of a desktop computer, a communications device, store large amounts of information, process documents, and no longer even need a mobile network to work as in many cases they can operate via a wi-fi system. Even a fairly weak signal will allow phones to function fully, given apps such as WhatsApp. They can also make encrypted communications to a high standard, which can make it much more difficult for traditional methods of interception to deal with them. The Bill is, therefore, very timely.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), who is sadly no longer in his place, highlighted that in 2016, the latest year for which figures are available, 13,000 mobile phones were confiscated. The problem will only continue to escalate, not least given the way technology can be used to make devices smaller, to deliver easier access and the potential fusion between people’s bodies and technology that can now be achieved in a way that would have been unimaginable only 10 or 15 years ago. It is right that we are looking to update the legislation.

The Bill is not about prison governors having to play whack-a-mole trying to find a phone that has just popped up and getting it blocked. It is about blocking off networks that are operating, and taking advantage of the technology to ensure a zone in which phones just do not operate. If that is possible technologically, there should be a legal power to enable it, which is what the Bill will do. That is why it is vital we give the Bill its Third Reading today.

For Members who are regulars on a Friday, I do not plan to go to my usual lengths of detailed analysis. [HON. MEMBERS: “More.”] I can hear their disappointment. It is strange to hear it from my hon. Friends—it is usually Opposition Members who demand more during my speeches—but today is not the day to set a two-hour record.

Today is about being clear about the target of the Bill. It will be interesting to hear how the Minister expects to work with the mobile phone networks to implement the Bill, and how he expects to work with those who provide other wireless communications systems that may be near prisons. For example, it would be no good knocking off mobile phone network signals only to discover someone has busily set up a wi-fi network covering the jail.

Phones can now fully operate via wi-fi, including for voice calls. Many of us have used the WhatsApp call feature, which is as simple as making a phone call. It will be interesting to hear about the work that will be done around jails, not just with the big mobile phone networks but to ensure that we knock out any potential wi-fi coverage, not least when a standard home hub can cover 100 metres, which shows the potential, and all the more so with mobile wi-fi technology.

This is a very welcome Bill, and it needs to happen. The law must try to keep pace with technology. Phones are advertised as able to beat body orifice scanners, which shows the lengths people are going to, and finding phones in prison will only become more challenging. This Bill is an appropriate fix and a proportionate move. Bluntly, there is no need for a person in prison to have a mobile phone to contact their family. There are legitimate ways of doing that via postal communications or the telephones that are provided.

Jeremy Quin: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Foster: I will not give way, because I am just about to take my seat. I am conscious of the time and I know that others wish to speak.

There are ways for people in prison to communicate and to keep in contact, but we must also remember that prisons are about protecting the public and ensuring that people cannot run a crime network from behind bars. That is why I support the Bill, and I will be pleased to see it get its Third Reading.

11.57 am

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a great honour to speak on this timely Bill, as we bring the law up to speed with emerging technologies, which present so much of a challenge to prison governors and warders as they go about their business.

It is also a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), and I am delighted he was able to make his speech without being harassed by a mobile phone, as he was on Second Reading—the timing of that interruption was extraordinary and is perhaps never to be beaten in the annals of Hansard. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for her calm, cool, thoughtful and detailed stewardship of the Bill.

I welcome the Bill, and I am delighted it is one that the Government support. As I have mentioned, this is a necessary Bill. I practised at the Bar before coming to serve in this place. As anyone who has worked at the criminal Bar will realise, mobile phone use in prison is now a serious problem. It is beyond a curious fact and it is beyond a joke. There is no suggestion that mobile phones are not available in prisons, because they are. Frankly, they are a form of currency and they are in daily use.

People in prison can do an extraordinary amount of things with a mobile phone. A number of Members have mentioned those things and, in some ways, we should get away from calling them mobile phones, because the time will come in the not-too-distant future when the extraordinarily capable devices we have in our pockets will replace desktop computers. We will be able simply to plug it in, and everything we do from a computing perspective will be carried around on this very small device.

These devices can be used to make calls, certainly, but that is by no means the only thing they can do. They can do everything from secure, encrypted instant messaging through to word processing and controlling things. So
Robert Courts: I do not agree more. When the iPad was first introduced, it was described as being a large iPhone that cannot make calls. We are almost now dealing with the reverse of that: a computer that just happens to make calls. Increasingly, that is a by-product that is not needed, because people might communicate by text message or WhatsApp—people can do absolutely everything. I recall thinking years ago, as basic phones started to include things such as photos and syncing with computers, that it would not be very long before that small device replaced everything else—we are well on the way to that now.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that we talk about these things as phones, but in reality we are talking about a computer system that can make calls?

Robert Courts: I could not agree more. When the iPad was first introduced, it was described as being a large iPhone that cannot make calls. We are almost now dealing with the reverse of that: a computer that just happens to make calls. Increasingly, that is a by-product that is not needed, because people might communicate by text message or WhatsApp—people can do absolutely everything. I recall thinking years ago, as basic phones started to include things such as photos and syncing with computers, that it would not be very long before that small device replaced everything else—we are well on the way to that now.

Jeremy Quin: My hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) alluded to the fact that people can use phones to take videos and smuggle them out of the prison system over the airwaves. That is dangerous to the discipline inside prisons. It makes it difficult for governors. Does my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) share my concern on that facet, in particular?

Robert Courts: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point and I entirely share his concern on discipline. I was about to mention photographs and a point that brings the one he made into sharp relief. When we first had phones with cameras on, the photographs were grainy and did not really show anything; they were not helpful as photographs. We now have extraordinary camera abilities with high-definition video. When those things are able to be operated from within a prison, people could photograph or video a prison officer and then harass them by sending that to someone who is outside. The prisoner could show exactly who that prison officer is, in order to humiliate them or blackmail them. That is a very serious problem.

It is also a serious problem that people can record something that is taking place in a prison. Another example of the obvious need for the Bill is that a prisoner can ring a contact on the outside and arrange for the delivery of drugs or other contraband, but this goes far, far beyond that. These extraordinary small devices provide the ability to run an entire business operation and those inside prisons have the ability to carry out an entire criminal operation. That has serious corrosive effects on the ability of prison officers to maintain discipline and to protect the public, as hon. Members have suggested.

Kevin Foster: Does my hon. Friend agree that not only do people have this ability to communicate, but that is now combined with what was once military-grade encryption technology? I alluded to that in my speech. Does he share my concern that it is bringing a whole new angle to this area?

Robert Courts: Yes, my hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. The ability to load software such as virtual private network software on to a telephone, to use WhatsApp, which is encrypted, and to communicate with people anywhere in the world while being able to disguise one’s own identity and geographical position presents enormous challenges for those who are trying to make sure that prison is a disciplined place that protects the public from the activities of those within it.

It is extraordinary that going to prison is really only a nuisance, and that if people have access to the right technology, they can carry on from inside prison in exactly the same way as they carried on outside, with only minor inconvenience. We should not allow that. We can see from the statistics—13,000 phones were seized in 2016, going up to 23,000 in 2017, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes said, with 7,000 SIM cards seized—that this is a real and pressing problem that we have to deal with now.

Why do we need this change to the law? Essentially, the existing law, as I understand it, enables governors to interfere with specific devices, but we are always playing catch-up. We do not know what technological advances are likely to come in the future; we simply know that they will come, and we need to be in a position to address them as and when they arise.

Let me address briefly some of the objections to the Bill that are germane to some of the issues we have been discussing. Having practised at the Bar, I am particularly sensitive to some of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) mentioned the important rehabilitative aspect of communication, but it is important that we see communication between prisoners and their families as distinct from their having mobile phones; the two are not the same thing. Prison must, of course, be a punishment and it must protect the public, but having represented people over the years, I have seen countless examples of people who go into prison, meet people and learn more criminal skills there, and come out and continue their criminal activity.

Alex Burghart: On families staying in touch when a family member is behind bars, does my hon. Friend agree that it is extremely important to maintain personal, physical contact? Being able to make weekly or daily calls is great, but it is hugely important for people to spend physical time with their child, and too often that is not available.
Robert Courts: Yes, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. He has great expertise from his background at the Centre for Social Justice and is well placed to comment on that. I could not agree more. It is critical that prisoners are able to remain in contact with their family members and loved ones, and not just through calls. It is not simply a matter of providing telephony services. We need only look at the statistics: as I understand it, people are 39% less likely to reoffend if they maintain regular contact with their family members. The reoffending rate is around 50% within a year, so it is clear that we must address that, however we look at the criminal justice system.

Jeremy Quin: Given my hon. Friend’s work at the criminal Bar prior to entering this place, he has a lot of experience of this issue. In response to the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), he referred to the need for regular prison visits so that prisoners can see their families in a physical context, and I totally agree with all that, but as much as we would all like to see it there are many cases in which that becomes incredibly difficult to achieve, including because of the geography—where prisons are. Therefore, properly handled telephone connectivity is incredibly important. I may refer to this if I catch Madam Deputy Speaker’s eye and am given a chance to speak, but the costs, which can be up to half the prisoner’s wage for a 10-minute call to a mobile phone, are prohibitive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ongar (Alex Burghart) said, that needs to be addressed.

Robert Courts: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The cost of calls in prisons is certainly being addressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes mentioned that, and I have no doubt that the Minister will, too, in due course, because the Government have undertaken that work.

I have raised all these points because we must distinguish between the need for communication, which we must have, and the having of mobile phones, which is not terribly helpful. Communication is required partly because we must reduce the reoffending rate—although I do not want to sound managerial—but also simply from the point of view of humanity. Yes, prisons are a punishment, but they must be humane. Say somebody has committed a crime that means they have to go to prison, but they are a single mother and there are children involved. Anybody who has represented someone who has that double heartbreak will realise that there must be a way to make sure, although we accept that they have to go to prison because they have to atone for what they have done, that families maintain contact with each other. A mother who is in prison should be able to make contact with her children outside, lest the children start to follow down the same road, which causes me great concern. We must improve the access to telephony which is permitted—I know that the Minister will talk to that in due course as well as prison visits.

I wish to make one or two more points before I resume my seat. A concern has been raised about co-opting private companies to assist the state. An Act of Parliament will be enacted. The Secretary of State will be making the regulations. It is important to remember that, as that provides the reassurance. The reason it is helpful that the technological burden is pushed to the providers rather than sitting with the prison governors is that it means that they are actively involved. That will help with the technological increases that we know will come in the years ahead, which means that we will not always be playing catch-up as technology advances.

My final point is about the understandable concern of residents who live near prisons that their service may be affected. If the companies that provide the services are involved, they will be involved in providing any solutions to any unintentional disruption in the much needed communication service for those who live outside.

I am very grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the time to speak. I welcome this Bill and I look forward to its further progress.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): It is a great pleasure to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker. There are a couple of problems that I associate with the 2017 general election, one of which is the loss of the Prisons and Courts Bill. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) has taken the opportunity of this valuable Bill, which plugs part of the gap that losing that Bill has presented. She is exactly the right person to do so not only because of the calm and collected way in which she has presented and promoted this Bill, as referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts), but because she has the privilege of hosting in her constituency the Sussex county jail. I do not wish to reopen old wounds between her constituents and mine, but the county jail moved from Lewes to Horsham in 1540 and there was a long-running, 305-year campaign by the people of Lewes to have it returned. They finally succeeded in 1845. For those of us who worry that our campaigns take rather a long time to prosper, they need look only to the doughty efforts of the constituents of my hon. Friend.

My hon. Friend proposes a simple and sensible move. Like her, I was shocked when I discovered that 23,000 mobile phones had been found in prisons in 2017. Those are just the ones that were discovered and apprehended. I, too, was looking for measures that could stop that flow of mobile phones into prisons. Indeed, I have used the opportunity of Justice questions to press my hon. Friend the Minister on the use of anti-drone technology around prisons. An excellent company in Horsham can bring down drones safely and prevent the use of drones to deliver drugs and mobile phones into prisons. The Minister was kind enough to meet me and pointed out that a combination of this excellent Bill and nets would be an equally effective way of stopping the problem, albeit less efficacious for the company in my constituency. I have not lost heart, though, on the Ministry of Defence, which will find its products very useful.

This Bill will, I hope and believe, reduce the abuse of mobile phones in jails. Jails are there to serve a purpose. At least part of that is to divorce criminal gangs from their leadership, to disrupt criminal gangs, to separate those individuals from society and to loosen the bonds of the criminal networks.

I am not going to discuss, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) did, “The Italian Job” or “The Man in the Iron Mask”. I am not naive. I do accept that, even prior to mobile telephony, there
were still means by which criminal gangs were able to communicate through prison walls. However, we owe it to our constituents to ensure that, just as we use every form of modern technology to apprehend criminals, we also use that technology to ensure that they are cut off from their gangs and their networks when they are serving time. That view, I think, has widespread support across this House—judging by the intervention of the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), I am sure of it—and we need to do all we can to crack down on that illicit use of phones.

But this is not only about deliberate, illicit use for criminal purposes—it is also about those who are desperate to get hold of a mobile phone for entirely legitimate reasons and find themselves prey to gangs inside jails. Our hearts go out to people who, for whatever reason they are in jail, are desperate to keep in contact with their families on the outside. They then become prey to the criminal activity inside the prison by not only supporting the efforts of those smuggling phones into jails but supporting the wider use of those smuggling networks for drugs and other assets. Another aspect of this Bill is that it should help to prevent those individuals from being abused by other criminals when they are at their most vulnerable, behind bars.

Two big concerns have been raised about the Bill. They have been given an airing already, but it is vital that they are properly addressed. First, this is about not only reducing the supply of phones but reducing the demand for them. The Howard League for Penal Reform and the Prison Reform Trust—respected organisations—have both been very clear about the need to reduce the demand for illicit telephones by ensuring that other means of telephonic communication are available to prisoners. I slightly take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) on one point, where I tried to intervene on him. It is really important, as I am sure he agrees, that we ensure that prisoners can have access to telephone calls. There are limited times in which those calls can be made.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney, the cost of a 10-minute call to a mobile phone can be up to half a prisoner’s weekly wage, and a 10-minute call to a landline can be a quarter of their wage. They have to make certain that they can get to the phone, with multiple prisoners trying to do the same thing, and they are out of their cells for only a short period during the day. There may be problems at the other end; their families may not be available to take the call. Access is incredibly important.

Kevin Foster: I completely agree that there is a need for families to have access and for prisoners to be able to keep key relationships, but there is a difference between the completely unregulated communications that a mobile phone—effectively a computer—can provide and the much more specific ones that a family telephone service can provide.

Jeremy Quin: I thank my hon. Friend. I must have misinterpreted his earlier remarks.

Secondly, I understood from my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr Gyimah), when he was the Minister on the previous Bill, that a huge amount of work is being done by the Department. My hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall) referred to the benefits that HMP Wayland has received from the roll-out of improved modern telephone services. Perhaps the Minister will pick up on that, I have been reassured by what the promoter of the Bill has said. I also understood that the Department, at that stage, was intending to re-tender the national telephony contracts. I hope that as a result of that re-tendering process the cost of calls for prisoners has been reduced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney and my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate, who has three prisons in his constituency, raised the issue of constituents around the prison being certain that their telephone signals are not interfered with. I heard words of reassurance on that from the promoter of the Bill, and perhaps the Minister could touch on it as well. I would want reassurance that Ofcom and the mobile phone operators are being consulted to ensure that there are not adverse consequences for those living around prisons.

Having expressed those two concerns, which I am sure will be addressed, I look forward to this Bill continuing to make progress through its remaining stages.

12.18 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): Prison serves many functions and purposes: to punish, to reform, but also to protect wider society. That protection relies on being able to restrict and prevent criminal activities in order to break up the existing networks and ensure that the crimes and offences for which prisoners are in jail cannot continue while they remain there.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) pointed out, technological advances have meant that mobile phones—effectively pocket computers—can be used almost as a mobile office. Almost wherever the user is, with anything more than a minimal signal they can continue with many activities. Of course, for most of us, those are perfectly professional and positive activities. Sadly, in too many of our prisons, the use of illicit phones is rather less positive.

An intrinsic feature of a custodial sentence is deprivation of liberty, part of which is the limitation of the rights and freedoms that those of us in society would normally expect to be able to exercise. Those who are in prison should not necessarily be able to expect the same connections and privileges enjoyed by those outside.

The primary purpose of the Bill is to allow mobile phone network providers to disrupt the use of unlawful mobile phones in prisons. We have heard about the large increase in the scale of the problem, with the number of mobile phones doubling in barely three years. That sharp increase is not due to some deficiency or inadequacy in the existing legislation—particularly the 2012 Act, which lays an important and valuable basis for prisons’ powers. Instead, it is the use by criminals, prisoners and offenders of technology that is evolving at a rate that legislation sometimes struggles to keep up with.

The Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), will help to address the gap in the powers that may be used by those who keep us safe. We must be clear that the illicit use of mobile phones undermines the safety and security of prisons, prison staff and other prisoners, and it increasingly allows prisoners to carry on organising and co-ordinating serious and, at times, violent crimes that take place outside prison, in the community.
Other action is being taken to tackle the issue of mobile phones in prisons. As we have heard, the number of phones confiscated has risen. Some £2 million has been invested in detection equipment, including handheld detectors and portable detection devices, and all prisons in England and Wales are being equipped with technology to strengthen searching and security, including portable detection poles that can be deployed at fixed points around entrances and visitor areas. Other new technology is being tested to tackle the threat posed by contraband smuggled into prisons, which includes illicit mobile phones as well as weapons, drugs and a whole range of items and materials that, for very good reasons, are excluded from our prisons.

These are important powers. One thing that I hope my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes or the Minister will clarify is the impact of the Bill on prison governors and whether any additional obligations and burdens might fall upon them as a result of these powers to allow mobile phone operators to take action. The Bill is a tool that can be deployed to disrupt communications that undermine the security of our prisons. We can improve the safety of prisons and take a step towards minimising criminal activity. If that is achieved, this legislation will have played an enormous role in helping to keep our prisons and wider society safe.

12.24 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart):
I thank all Members who have spoken today, and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for promoting this important Bill. I also thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) who introduced the Bill in its original version, and my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) who brought forward the 2012 version.

This has been an astonishing tour d’horizon, and powerful speeches by an extraordinary number of hon. and right hon. Members have touched on fundamental issues concerning the purpose of prison. Members have mentioned the rehabilitative aspects of prison, as well as incapacitation, retribution and deterrence, but we must begin by thinking about the device of a mobile phone itself. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Maggie Throup) powerfully pointed out, this device is not simply a telephone, and when considering this Bill we must consider its relationship to prison in general.

Prison is designed to isolate somebody from the public, and in contemporary society prison is effectively a punishment of segregation or isolation which includes the breaking of communication. The difference between being in a prison cell, as intended by the prison’s administration, and being in a cell with this device in one’s hand, is absolute. In a cell, someone without such a device can expect to be controlled by the regime in terms of access to media and communications. With a device in their hand, however, their entire life becomes different—they are no longer quite a prisoner; they are someone who can begin to become an active, involved individual who can reach out well beyond the walls of their cell. Relatively rapidly in the short time available, let me talk through what that actually means and how that feels in a prison.

Having such a device effectively means that someone can set an alarm, wake up, and use a torch to communicate with the drone outside their prison cell. They can use their device to pilot the drone to their window, and having had their drugs delivered, they can sit back and go on Skype or Facebook, or make a WhatsApp video call with their partner outside prison. They can sit back, watch a movie, go on Facebook, and fall asleep. When they wake up in the morning they can use the device for their personal fitness training, or begin trading shares and make a little money.

As their morning starts, perhaps after breakfast, they can begin to use their device more actively to run their criminal gang outside the prison walls—that is the moment at which they pick up their mobile telephone to call a business rival, intimidate a witness, or organise the importation of drugs or weapons into the country. Having done that, the device then becomes a weapon within the prison itself. It allows someone to go to another prisoner and say, “You owe me £35 for the drugs that I dealt you last week”, or to calculate a 50% interest payment, or the interest payment attributed to a particular cell. The device allows someone to take a photograph of an individual and send it to their partner. If an individual will not pay, the device allows someone to feed them Spice and, as happened recently, put them in a washing machine, video them, and load an image of them going round and round on social media.

This device can also be used for research—it permits someone to get online, find out what the man sharing their cell has been convicted for, discover something about the business they used to run or the assets they might possess, and establish their address and where their partner is located. The device allows someone to undermine the prison regime, or take a photograph of their prison officer and share it with a friend outside the prison walls, so that they can follow the prison officer home. This device allows someone to research the entire family background of their prison officer, and when they have finished doing that—perhaps in the evening when they are locked up again—they can begin using the device actively to commit crime.

Someone could use their device to hack into other people’s websites, or to access the dark web and start trading weapons or slaves on line. This device might then allow them to begin going on social media. They might not wish to, but they could retweet an ISIS video on this device. They could use this device, through social media, to simultaneously organise disturbances across 30 or 40 prisons at the same time, and time when those disturbances took place. Above all, what they would be doing through their continual use of this device, going on Facebook and Twitter, is continually humiliating and offending their victims. They have been locked away as a sex offender or a violent offender, and their victim is suddenly finding that they are on Twitter or Facebook sharing their views on the world, talking to their friends and generally behaving as though they are not in prison.

That therefore brings us from the device to the purpose of the Bill. This is where the contributions by hon. and right hon. Members have been so important. The first point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall), which is what we have to begin with, is that this device undermines the effective functions of a prison. It undermines the authority of the prison officers. It undermines their ability to use incentives and the earning of privileges in order to control the behaviour...
of a prisoner. Basically, it means that a prison is less safe and less functioning, and is unable to perform its functions.

It was clear from nearly the dozen speeches we heard today that there were four quite different concepts of prison. Roughly speaking, my hon. Friend the Members for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), for Hitchin and Harpenden (Bim Afolami), for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) and for Cheadle (Mary Robinson) focused on the rehabilitative aspects of a prison. My hon. Friend the Members for Croydon South (Chris Philp) and for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) focused on the function of prison in terms of incapacitation. My hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) focused on the importance of retribution within prison. My hon. Friend the Members for Havant (Alan Mak) and for Dudley South (Mike Wood) focused on deterrence.

I am simplifying—the speeches touched on many different aspects of the use of a prison—but by focusing on those four quite different purposes of a prison we can bring into clear focus the different ways in which this powerful device or weapon in the hands of a prisoner can be used to undermine the purpose of a prison. If we were to focus, as my hon. Friend for Croydon South focused on the example of escapes being organised, I would not be making it—is that this device is what stops a prisoner suddenly dropping off the edge of a cliff when they leave prison and re-enter society. A prisoner who has been locked up for 15 years without access to this device and without access to social media has very little idea of the society outside the prison walls. A prisoner who has access to this device is able to continue family contact, is able to access to this device is able to keep up with the world, is able to educate themselves, is able to take German lessons, is able to go on Wikipedia. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury explained in her speech, there is a sense—as my hon. Friend the Member for Hindon and Harpenden, for Banbury and for Cheadle do, on the question of rehabilitation, then suddenly the telephone can seem a rather attractive way of containing the prisoner’s ability to communicate with broader society.

The argument that might be made—I would not be making it—is that this device is what prevents a prisoner suddenly dropping off the edge of a cliff when they leave prison and re-enter society. A prisoner who has been locked up for 15 years without access to this device and without access to social media has very little idea of the society outside the prison walls. A prisoner who has access to this device is able to continue family contact, is able to keep up with the world, is able to educate themselves, is able to take German lessons, is able to go on Wikipedia. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury explained in her speech, there is a sense—as my hon. Friend the Members for Hindon and Harpenden, for Banbury and for Cheadle do, on the question of rehabilitation, then suddenly the telephone can seem a rather attractive way of containing the prisoner’s ability to communicate with broader society.

But—this is where the speech by the hon. Member for Croydon South is so important—this device flagrantly challenges the fundamental principle of prison, which is that of incapacitation. In the example of Craig Hickinbottom, in the example of escapes being organised from prison, this device leaps over the prison walls. The prison walls no longer become a method of incapacitating a prisoner, but instead become a fluid substance through which the prisoner can continue to intimidate society, run a criminal gang and operate; in effect, as though they were not incarcerated at all.

This touches on the question raised by my hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar and for North Cornwall when they talked about the rehabilitative function of prison. If the point of prison is to ensure that the criminal is punished for the historical crime they committed, the question is this: is it adequate retribution to allow somebody to sit in a prison cell with this device? What do we mean by that? Clearly central to the question of punishment is the question of the deprivation of liberty, which involves the deprivation of communication. In so far as we are unable to punish a prisoner in other ways, and many of the other ways in which people were traditionally punished have been removed, an individual is now sent to prison as punishment, not for punishment. In other words, the idea is that the individual goes to prison and the punishment is that deprivation of liberty. However, as hon. and right hon. Members have pointed out, the possession of this device could potentially undermine the fundamental principle of that punishment by giving a prisoner a range of liberties—the ability to speak to their family at a moment’s notice, the ability to go online, the ability to stream videos and music, and the ability to continue to live the life of an active citizen from within the prison walls—which is not consistent with the judge’s intention.

That brings me to the fourth purpose of prison, emphasised by my hon. Friends the Members for Havant and for Dudley South, which is, of course, deterrence. On the surface, the issues around deterrence and incapacitation would appear to be the same issue, but they are not. The question of retribution, in particular, involves the judge accurately calibrating the punishment to fit the historical crime. The question in relation to the mobile telephone is the extent to which the deprivation of the mobile telephone is in proportion to the exact crime that the individual has committed.

The question of deterrence is quite different. It relates to the notion of an exemplary sentence—in other words, deterrence relates not to the past and to the historical crime committed by the individual, but to the future and wider society. The question then is: does this mobile telephone and its possession represent for broader society something that would be expected by the potential criminal, and the deprivation of which would dissuade them from committing that criminal act?

Superficially, all the questions around mobile telephones seem as though they are just questions of technology, but they are not just that—they go to the fundamental purpose of prison. Again, it might superficially seem that we can just say, “Prison exists for all these things. It exists to incapacitate, deter, rehabilitate and to take retribution,” but this is not true in reality. If we look at the debates that happen within criminal justice, we are unable to resolve these fundamental issues, and the reason is that the principles, or assumptions, from which these things are derived are in conflict with each other. They can be in conflict in different ways.

It has been a great privilege to hear from so many learned Friends today—and indeed, I would be delighted to take interventions from any of them—and they have managed to put their finger on deep philosophical distinctions.

Jeremy Quin: I would not describe myself as “learned”, either in fact or by courtesy. My hon. Friend is making a very powerful and interesting speech about the philosophy of prisons. It occurred to me, listening to him, how profoundly things have changed over the last 30 or 40 years. If we compare and contrast what an offender might have done in society 20, 30 or 40 years ago with the situation now, we see how markedly things have changed. I am thinking about people’s personal lives—their
access to films, the internet and the way they conduct themselves. If we compare how people conduct their social lives now with 30 years ago, when social life was more community-based, it is clear that things have changed greatly, and that needs to be reflected in the prison sentences and jails.

Rory Stewart: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The questions around the telephone is what we expect in society as a whole and the relationship of a prison to what happens in broader society. What we see in our prisons is that in fact they ultimately mirror broader society. What was acceptable in the 19th century is not acceptable today. For example, in Pentonville prison 175 years ago solitary confinement meant total silence and the use of masks for 23 hours a day. Slopping out, which happened as recently as the 1980s—in other words, the fact that prisoners did not have lavatories in their cells—has ceased to be acceptable. Our views on whether prisoners should have showers in their cells might change in 20 or 30 years’ time.

Our views on how a mobile telephone relates to normal life will also change. Will a mobile phone begin to feel so fundamentally interwoven with our social life, our communications and the way we live in a 21st-century society that to be deprived of it will feel quite different in 20 years’ time from how it feels today, or how it might have felt 20 years ago?

Therefore, in trying to work out how to frame legislation and how to treat prisoners, we have to deal with social change at a range of different levels; we have to deal with changes in culture and society over time; and we have to deal with clashes of values between individuals that cannot be reconciled.

The interesting point raised by my learned friends who focused on the question of retribution in justice goes to the fundamental question of what we are entitled to do to an individual.

Alan Mak: Does my hon. Friend agree that we experience not only cultural change, but technological change? One of the strengths of the Bill is that it sets out a framework that will help to future-proof the statute book with regard to technological change.

Rory Stewart: That is absolutely right. Indeed, the very existence of the Bill shows how quickly technology is changing. We began in 2007 simply by making it illegal to have a mobile telephone in prison—it carries a maximum sentence of two years. One would have thought that there would therefore be no problem with simply jamming the signal in prisons to prevent the use of mobile telephones, because having one was illegal. What on earth is the problem with putting in place the technology to stop that? What we discovered, of course, is that that presents a huge range of philosophical, legal and technological challenges. That explains why we had another Bill in 2012 and, thanks to the very good work of my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes, another Bill now in 2018.

Those challenges are quite significant. Let me deal first with the philosophical challenge. Article 8 of the European convention on human rights allows for a right to privacy. The 2012 legislation began to give the Secretary of State the authority to deal with the question of the right to privacy, and also to deal with the unanticipated consequences, which have been raised by various hon. Members, of the blocking technology affecting the lives of people outside the prison walls. Even that is not sufficient, because there is then a series of changing regulations relating to Ofcom, for example.

The 2012 legislation tried to deal with the gap between what can be authorised to a Crown servant—in this case the governor of a public prison—and what instructions can be given to the director of a private prison, such as one run by G4S, Serco or Sodexo. That was resolved in 2012, but what happened then—this point has been raised already—is that we are simply walking around a prison with various devices. What devices can be used in a prison? Before this legislation, we could wander around a prison with a metal detector, which can pick up the metal in a mobile telephone. We could wander around with a wand that picks up the microwave signals from a phone, but the phone might be very small and hidden almost anywhere in a messy cell. What we were unable to do, except with the co-operation of the mobile telephone company, is operate from the mast.

Under the previous legislation, we were forced effectively to jam the signal by transmitting on the same frequency that the mobile telephone company transmits. The company moves from 3G to 4G and the signal changes. Let us imagine that there are three masts from three companies surrounding a prison, all of which are transmitting on different frequencies. Those frequencies change over time, as do their strengths. The prison will find itself trying to transmit on a frequency, and when the frequency changes they miss it. They find the frequency again and they transmit at a certain strength, but then the signal strength increases against them. As they increase the signal strength, they increase the likelihood that they will take out mobile telephone communications from the surrounding houses. That would be a real risk in Brixton, for example.

We are dealing all the time with technological change. The speeches of my hon. Friends the Members for Horsham, for Erewash, for Torbay (Kevin Foster) and for Witney (Robert Courts) were particularly powerful in dealing with the ways in which that technological change drives this legislation, necessitates this legislation, and will challenge this legislation.

Alex Burghart: My hon. Friend is making an extremely powerful speech. May I raise a practical point? I imagine that people living or working near prisons may fear that this change will reduce the quality of the signals in their houses or businesses. What reassurances can my hon. Friend give?

Rory Stewart: That is a fundamental question, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend has asked it. It is, in fact, addressed both in the 2012 Act and in the schedule to the Bill. In the schedule, new subsection (4A) provides for the Secretary of State, in authorising the mobile telephone company—the mobile network operator—also to place an obligation on that operator not to interfere with the communications of individuals outside the prison walls, and to require the operator to take remedial action if any such interference should take place. That is a very good challenge.

My hon. Friends the Members for Torbay and for Witney also raised other issues, such as encryption and the potential setting up of a wi-fi network within the
prison walls. That is not always easy. I assure Members that whenever we try to put wi-fi into a prison, we find that 150-year-old Victorian walls make it almost impossible to get a signal into it. On the other hand, criminals can often be extraordinarily entrepreneurial and ingenious in getting around problems that may defeat our engineers.

At the core of this, however, is not simply a question of technology. Let us return to the question of the four purposes of prison, and let us return in particular to the question of retribution. The key idea of retribution in relation to the mobile telephone is the idea that you are punishing a criminal for a crime that he committed in the past. As was suggested by a number of learned Members, that is a fundamental philosophical principle relating to the nature of the rights of that individual.

As Immanuel Kant pointed out, the individual should, as a matter of rational logic and a categorical imperative, be treated only as an end in himself, not as a means to an end. In other words, we should not be punishing individual A in order to change the behaviour of individual B. We should not even be punishing individual A in order to change the future behaviour of individual B. We should not even be punishing individual A in order to change the future behaviour of individual A. As Kant argues, the retributive punishment should be directed only towards the historical action of the individual, and should relate only to that historical crime. Kant is therefore arguing that neither deterrence, which is punishing individual A in order to affect the behaviour of individual B, nor rehabilitation, which is punishing individual A in order to affect the future behaviour of individual A, is a valid form of punishment.

Those Members who advanced utilitarian arguments were making a completely different set of points. Their arguments were, in fact, arguments about society more broadly. They were suggesting that what matters is not the historical action committed by the individual, but society as a whole, and the future consequences. They might well argue that what matters is not what the individual did in the past—that has happened, and there is no point in crying over spilt milk—but how we change society in the future. How do we ensure, through the punishment that we inflict on this individual, that this individual does not go on and reoffend? How do we ensure, through the punishment that we inflict on this individual, that others are deterred from committing a crime?

In that fundamental clash between a Kantian deontological world view focused on the rights of the individual and the dignity of the individual, and a consequentialist or utilitarian argument in which the individual may suffer for the greater happiness of the greater number, we have something that cannot be resolved in this Chamber, because such fundamental values and principles are beyond the ability of this Chamber to resolve. All we can try to do—through the media, through civil society, through Parliament, through legislation—is listen to these types of debate, understand them and articulate them, but we can never fully resolve them. That is why this legislation needs to be able to contain a powerful and enormous element of flexibility.

As technology changes and this device—this mobile telephone that I am now holding up—becomes more powerful, as the ways in which 4G or 5G technology emerge, as my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) points out, and as social attitudes towards punishment, crime and indeed social attitudes towards mobile telephones change, we need legislation that can keep up with that change. A day may come when some elements of the speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury, whose emplacement of the centrality and normalcy of this phone in our everyday family lives and especially in the lives of our children, may begin to predominate over the kinds of argument made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South.

Jeremy Quin: It has been said that one does hear Kant in the Chamber occasionally, but rarely so eruditely expressed; it is wonderful to hear the Minister’s philosophical discussion. He talked about the centrality of mobile phones; the centrality a lot of us were concerned about was the direct use of the mobile phone to direct criminal networks and criminal gangs on the other side of prison walls. On the strict practicalities of the use of mobile phones, will the Minister reassure me that this Bill will help prevent that very real problem?

Rory Stewart: Yes; in essence the point about the mobile telephone is that we need to understand it not as a telephone. It is of course a communications device and as such, particularly in telephonic communication, it can be used to control criminal gangs, but we must also take on board its full use, and understand that it is also a recording device, a way of accessing the internet, and a wallet in which money is contained and through which money can be transferred, and that it therefore can be used to intimidate people—to intimidate witnesses—to run criminal gangs and do all sorts of things right through to piloting a drone through a window. Once we understand that, we begin to understand that this device is a weapon, not a communications device, and what follows from that are all the things Members have raised in terms of criminality: the importing of illicit substances, the accessing of illicit entertainment, the making of illicit money, the running of illicit gangs, the extortion of money, the undermining of a prison regime, the committing of crime, its use for terrorism and for promoting disturbances, and create victims through social media.

All of which brings me finally back to the legislation itself. On the surface, this Bill seems very straightforward, and in fact of course, as Members have pointed out, the core of this legislation sits at proposed new subsection (2A) to the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Act 2012:

“The Secretary of State may authorise a public communications provider to interfere with wireless telegraphy.”

The key point here is that it is addressed to the public communications provider rather than, as is the case in the 2012 legislation, to the governor of a prison or the director of a private prison.

Chris Philp: I touched in my speech on a question about this proposed provision, asking whether the word “authorise” confers adequate power on a Minister or Secretary of State: if they authorise someone to do something, they may not follow that authorisation—they may ignore him. Should that word therefore be changed to “compel” or “require” in order to give the Secretary of State the power he or she needs?

Rory Stewart: That is an interesting question, and the answer is that, as currently drafted, this word “authorise” means exactly that: it is giving legal permission. The anxiety of the mobile telephone companies would be
that without that authorisation, were they to conduct these operations they would be in breach of Ofcom regulations and ultimately in breach of article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998. Under this legislation therefore, all we are doing is saying to a willing mobile telephone company that, should it voluntarily wish to work with us, this gives it the authority to do so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South has raised an interesting point, however. What would happen if the mobile telephone company were to turn round and refuse to comply? To some extent that is hypothetical, because we have not yet encountered a mobile telephone provider that is not prepared to work with us on this, for a range of reasons. The mobile telephone companies’ relationship with Ofcom and the Government is complex, deep and interlinked, and they generally wish to retain the goodwill of the Government. It is also true that in some cases we would have a commercial contract with a mobile telephone company to undertake this work, so it would have a financial interest in working with us. Hypothetically, however, it remains the case that under this legislation, a mobile telephone company would be able to refuse to provide the service. We do not believe that it would do so, but my hon. Friend is absolutely correct to say that, theoretically, it could do so under this legislation.

Alex Burghart: Has my hon. Friend’s Department received assurances from the major providers that they are happy with the legislation as it stands and that they intend to work with the Government in the future?

Rory Stewart: Yes, the Department works closely with the major providers and our understanding at the moment is that they are all willing to work with us in line with this legislation.

I shall move towards a conclusion, and I shall try to end within the next three minutes. I want to move quickly through the Bill, and to clarify matters for hon. Members before they vote on it. In proposed new subsection (2B), “preventing the use” and “detecting or investigating the use” are the key purposes to which this authorisation can be put. In other words, the point of this is to ensure that we can prevent someone from using their mobile telephone, that we can find their mobile telephone, and that we can work out what they are doing with it.

Proposed new subsection (2C) will probably trouble, confuse, amuse and perplex a number of Members. It states that an authorisation may be given in relation to “one or more relevant institutions… one or more kinds of relevant institution… or relevant institutions”.

Even a very learned and distinguished colleague such as my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury might struggle to work out why on earth we are distinguishing between those three categories. Perhaps she would like to intervene on me at this point. The answer is that parliamentary counsel is trying to provide for the possibility of our giving authorisation to, for example, two prisons in the adult male estate, such as Brixton and Wandsworth, or to two kinds of prison, let us say a young offenders institution such as Feltham and an adult male institution such as Brixton. Alternatively, we might wish to give a more general authorisation to all institutions of the relevant kind—for example, all the young offender institutions in the country or all the adult male institutions in the country. This is a perfect time for my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury to intervene on me.

Victoria Prentis: I thank the Minister for giving way, but he certainly does not need my help or that of more learned colleagues. The point he is making is an important one, which is that the current legislation is clunky and difficult for governors and Ministers to use, and that this legislation will make things much easier and more effective.

Rory Stewart: That is an enormous relief.

Chris Philp: The Minister has mentioned the word “authorise” again. I heard his clarification earlier. As the Bill is drafted, the mobile phone companies would not be absolutely required to comply, but can he confirm that it is the expectation and the intention of the Government—and, I think, of this House—that when the Government ask a public communications provider to interfere with wireless telegraphy in a prison, it will comply with that request, and that the Government and the House would take a dim view if any public communications provider did not comply with such a request?

Rory Stewart: Without wishing to sound like Mr Speaker, I think my hon. Friend has made his point with great force and clarity, and I am sure that anyone listening to the debate will have taken on board his message very clearly.

In conclusion, I should like to thank hon. and right hon. Members for their patience. This has been a relatively long debate, and we have touched in extreme and excruciating detail on the philosophical foundations of the legislation, as well as on the technological applications of mobile telephones. It has been a really worthwhile debate. Having spoken at some length, I want to finish with a short moment of sincerity to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes, in particular, and also other right hon. and hon. Members for their often intelligent, interesting and illuminating contributions.

The Bill matters: it goes to the heart of how prisons are run, what they exist for, how we punish someone and what a prisoner can do from within a prison’s walls to intimidate prison officers and other prisoners, profit themselves and organise crime in broader society.

Giving Government the power to ensure that these illegal acts, currently punishable by a maximum sentence of up to two years in prison, can be prevented with the latest technology and the consent of mobile telephone operators, which will allow us to pinpoint the devices, block them and follow their traffic, will be an extraordinary contribution to reducing drugs, violence and disorder in prisons, making them safer and more decent, and ultimately protecting the broader public.

1.1 pm

Maria Caulfield: With the leave of the House, I would like to put on record my thanks to everyone as we reach this stage of the Bill. I thank particularly the Clerks in the Public Bill Office, the team at the Ministry of Justice and my right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Ms McVey), who instigated the Bill. I also thank the Minister for his support throughout the Bill’s progress and all hon. Members who have given up their Fridays and vital constituency work to be here and make sure that the Bill goes through.
The Bill will empower the National Data Guardian to ensure that cancer researchers can take full advantage of the future possibilities of genomics and Artificial Intelligence, and whatever comes after genomics and AI, where every patient can have confidence that their data will be used in a way which is consensual, safe, and transparent.

For the vast majority of patients (98%) who are happy for their data to be used, it also helps them have confidence that not only can their data be used, but that it will be used, responsibly, for the purposes patients already expect.

I am grateful for all her efforts behind the scenes to get us to Third Reading.

I also thank the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, who kindly wrote to me yesterday:

“Placing the National Data Guardian on a statutory footing is significant in increasing public trust in the appropriate and effective use of health and care data, in promoting challenge and building assurance across the health and care system, and enabling the system to access the data that it needs to run safely, effectively and efficiently.

I would like to once more confirm the Government’s commitment to the Bill.”

I am grateful to him for that letter.
The excellent Minister at the Dispatch Box, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Jackie Doyle-Price), has been so helpful in the preparation of this Bill. She has put more work into this than she had to, and I really appreciate her help.

The National Data Guardian’s role is to help to make people safe and to give them confidence that their information is securely safeguarded. Dame Fiona Caldicott is the National Data Guardian. I do not know whether hon. Members have met her, but she is a formidable lady. There are Caldicott guardians in every hospital, and we are now putting her role on a statutory footing. Her help in preparing the Bill has been immense. I hope she will go on for many more years, but when she does retire, there will be a new National Data Guardian—that will definitely happen.

The priority of the National Data Guardian is to build trust in the use of data across health and social care. The Data Guardian is guided by three main principles:

“encouraging clinicians and other members of care teams to share information to enable joined-up care, better diagnosis and treatment;

ensuring there are no surprises to the citizen about how their health and care data is being used and that they are given a choice about this; and

building a dialogue with the public about how we all wish information to be used, to include a range of voices including commercial companies providing drugs and services to the NHS, researchers discovering new connections that transform treatments, and those managing the services”.

I am also very grateful to Baroness Caroline Chisholm of Owlpen, who will be taking the Bill through the House of Lords, should it receive its Third Reading today. She will be known to many on the Conservative Benches, as we had to deal with her when she was head of candidates, so many of us here will appreciate her greatly. I also want to give particular thanks to the Labour Opposition and to the shadow Minister for all his support. I am in a difficult position, in that my Bill got its Second Reading after the Bill that would change the parliamentary constituencies. Every week at Prime Minister’s questions, the public think it is about party political point scoring and that we never work together. Of course that is not what happens; the vast majority of Bills that go through this House are improved by what the Opposition do, as is the case with my Bill. I particularly want to thank the Opposition for not blocking this Bill. I have to say that when the Speaker was in the Chair and this Bill, standing in my name, came up for its Second Reading, he paused for a very long time, expecting someone to object—presumably he thought it would be someone from our side. It would have been quite appropriate if the Labour Opposition had objected to my Bill if they had wanted to do so because it went ahead of their Bill, which had already got its Second Reading. I am therefore very grateful to the Opposition. I have chosen today for the Third Reading so that there are still opportunities for that Bill to proceed, if it is given its money resolution.

I do not want to take too much more time, because I understand the pressure we are under today, but I wish to mention a couple of things that were raised in Committee. I am grateful in particular to my hon. Friends the Members for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and for Shipley (Philip Davies), and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) for their involvement in the Committee. I was brave to put those three on a Committee, but the hon. Member for Rhondda asked a particularly difficult question. The Minister answered it well, but, on reflection, I can now provide a bit more clarification. This Bill says that it extends to the territory of England and Wales, which it does, but it applies only to England. The logical question was, “Why on earth did it apply to England and Wales then?” In layman’s terms, the answer is simply that as a legal entity in Parliament England does not exist, and England and Wales are lumped together. We can have a Bill that extends to England and Wales; to England, Wales and Scotland; or to England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. That is the answer on this point, and this Bill applies only to England. On reflection, I recall that I am a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. I do not think I quite managed to get the answer across on that point in Committee.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Can my hon. Friend let the House know what the equivalent arrangements are, if any, in Wales and Scotland?

Mr Bone: The answer to that, of course, is that those places have devolution and it is up to them to make their decisions. Obviously, I believe that what we are doing in England is best practice and I am sure they will take note of it. At that point, I ought to conclude. I thank everyone for their help so far, and I hope we can make progress later on.

1.14 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) on his success in making progress on this Bill in pretty quick time—as he candidly said, quicker than some other private Members’ Bills, which may well be down to the Government’s view on the merits of particular Bills. As the hon. Gentleman said, there are other Bills that we would like to see make progress, but that is not to detract from the merits of this one.

As I said when we last debated the Bill, the Opposition welcome the decision to put the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care on a statutory footing. As we know, the use of data has the potential to improve every aspect of the NHS, from transforming the way in which we diagnose illnesses such as cancer to improving the patient experience by ensuring that every clinician at every stage has the complete picture. We know from experience that the use of data in the NHS can be controversial at times, and patients sometimes raise concerns. Those concerns are not unfounded.

Official figures show that more than 100,000 patients were caught up in NHS data blunders in 2016-17. The number of serious data incidents has doubled in a year and they are now occurring at a frequency of one every three weeks. It emerged last year that NHS Shared Business Services had failed to deliver just under 709,000 letters from hospitals to GP surgeries, with the correspondence being left in an unknown warehouse. Such examples show the importance of an effective, modern data protection system with robust safeguards, which is central to securing public trust and confidence in the NHS.
Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): The hon. Gentleman might or might not be aware, but in Cornwall we have a higher proportion of cases of glaucoma than any other place in the country, and we know no reason why. Does he agree that sharing information on that could help us to understand why some of these complex conditions occur? Does he also agree that when the Data Guardian is in place, they might be able to look at and break down the data to work out why some of these conditions exist?

Justin Madders: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that there are many variations in conditions and, indeed, outcomes throughout the whole country. The importance of data in establishing patterns cannot be understated.

Chris Philp: The British Heart Foundation recently said of the research environment that “too much” of its researchers’ time “is taken up with unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy. The weight of this form-filling is slowing down vital discoveries”. Does the hon. Gentleman share my hope that putting this role on a statutory footing will help to address such concerns?

Justin Madders: Whenever we speak to anyone in the NHS, particularly GPs, they express concern about form filling, but it is important that due processes are followed and that there is a clear audit line. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman can have a word with the Minister about what practical steps can be taken to deal with some of the British Heart Foundation’s concerns.

We support the establishment of a statute-backed Data Guardian because it is one way to improve confidence in the way data is used. As I said in Committee, we are concerned that the Bill does not include an absolute obligation for data controllers to act on advice—only to have regard to it—and there appears to be no requirement for organisations to state proactively how they have dealt with such advice. Responses to question 5 of the Government’s consultation were overwhelmingly supportive of such a provision. In that question, the Government proposed that “organisations holding health and care data which could be used to identify individuals should be required to publish all materials demonstrating how they have responded to advice from the National Data Guardian.”

In their response to the consultation, the Government said:

“Responses were supportive of the proposal that the national data guardian should be given formal advice giving powers.”

That would certainly provide reassurances that the National Data Guardian will have real authority and act as an independent voice for patients. Without statutory backing, it is foreseeable that the National Data Guardian’s authority and independence could be undermined. Without a requirement for organisations that receive advice to provide evidence of their response, it could be difficult to be sure that the National Data Guardian is effective in doing the important job required by the Bill.

I am sure that Members will recognise that the requirement for a body to have regard to advice does not always mean that the body acts on that advice. We know that how clinical commissioning groups interpret the guidance of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence leads to some variations in the way in which treatments are dispensed and that advice does seem to be ignored with impunity by CCGs.

I know that the hon. Member for Wellingborough does not see the need for additional powers to be handed to the guardian, and does not want to see a regulator, which is the road that my proposals may be taking us down, but it is important that, when the Minister responds, she gives us some indication as to what yardstick she proposes will be used to ensure that the concerns that I have set out will be effectively judged by the guardian.

In conclusion, although I have set out some concerns, we are not intending to oppose the Bill as it is currently drafted today.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called so early in this debate to speak on the Bill. I particularly wanted to do so to give it my fulsome support, but also because I had the pleasure—and it was a pleasure—to serve on the Bill Committee for the Data Protection Act 2018. We had 10 sittings over five days, and fascinating it was, too. What came out of that Committee was a much improved Bill, or Act as it now is. What my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) does with this very important Bill is to create a vital adjunct to that Act. This is designed to work hand in glove with the Data Protection Act and the two will work together, which is why I am delighted to be able to make a contribution here.

I want to echo what was said in congratulating not only my hon. Friend on this Bill, but the mother of the Bill in its previous form, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who, now that she is my Whip, I am bound to say is an extraordinarily wise Member of this House. If nothing else, this Bill should be known as one that she has helped in its genesis.

Apart from the procedural reasons that my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough cited for why we are bringing this Bill to the House today, there is also another reason why it is extraordinarily appropriate, which is that today is, of course, the 70th anniversary of the national health service. It is absolutely right that we take a moment to remember that and to thank all of those who work so hard in it. How appropriate it is that we hope to progress this Bill today on this auspicious anniversary, because it will have a very significant role to play in the future of our national health service.

The Bill seeks to ensure that particular care is taken in the health and social care system when it comes to the holding of private data. It is something about which, rightly, there is huge public concern. Here is why. That sort of data and the technology on which it relies will have a massive role to play in our healthcare system. Technology will revolutionise the way in which we provide health and social care services in our communities. I have to say, on a personal note, that it is of particular benefit to rural areas such as North Devon, where we have particular geographic challenges. Quite simply, many people have to make long journeys to physically access the sort of healthcare provision that they have a right to expect in the 21st century. What this sort of technology does—the Bill goes a long way to protect people’s data as part of that—is, in effect, to put a
doctor in the palm of someone’s hand through smartphone technology. It is slightly odd that we have just had a debate about the evils of smartphones in one aspect of our social policy thinking, as the Government are debating an area where smartphones are having a definite and precise benefit.

There is something more precise though, and that is artificial intelligence and the way it is used to improve healthcare provision. AI has the capacity to provide better treatment for individuals who are suffering from cancer, for example. Scientists at the University of Stanford have done a remarkable trial that has shown that artificial intelligence is extraordinarily accurate in identifying skin cancer, for instance. We are reaching a point where it is no longer necessary for a doctor, nurse or medical professional physically to examine a patient: there is now artificial intelligence that is able to do that remotely. I understand from the research that has been done that it has a very high degree of accuracy in identifying skin cancer. This sort of technology could help to improve healthcare dramatically. Not only can artificial intelligence identify cancer, but developers are currently working on utilising it to help with treatment as well. It can assess factors such as the patient’s genetic history and lifestyle choices, for instance, to identify the most effective course of treatment. In fact, the Government intend to use AI to prevent more than 20,000 cancer-related deaths by 2023, but its long-term potential is much greater than that.

However—this is the crux of the matter—for these sorts of innovations to work and for us to be able to embrace this sort of technology securely and safely, and with peace of mind for the general public, a great deal of very personal information will need to be securely processed and stored while ensuring that it cannot be misused. That is what causes a great deal of concern among the public. If we want to ensure that individuals are going to take full advantage of these new technological breakthroughs that allow such improvements in healthcare, we have to be able to provide them with the absolute, copper-bottomed assurance that, when they provide the data that allows this sort of technology to intervene in their healthcare, they can be absolutely sure that they have confidence in the system of data storage, and confidence in the way in which their data will be processed, used and protected. We must achieve this through the instigation of a system that ensures the minimum possible data breaches, with robust guidance on good practice and established procedures to minimise damage. This Bill, working in partnership with the Data Protection Act, will go a long way towards achieving that.

The main purpose of the Bill is to establish the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care to promote the provision of advice and guidance about the processing of data. Specifically, and really importantly, the Bill establishes the National Data Guardian as a statutory office holder. We have such an official at the moment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough said, but the Bill puts the post on a statutory footing.

That is important for two reasons. First, it gives the public absolute confidence in the system, because there is no higher degree of official backing for what the National Data Guardian is and does than to have it on a statutory footing as passed by this place. Secondly, it maximises the post holder’s accountability to this place.

I am pleased that there is provision not only for a regular review of the work of the National Data Guardian but a suggestion that she—at the moment, it is a she—should produce an annual report and is accountable for reporting that review to this House. That is why it is absolutely vital that those provisions are in the Bill, and I am extremely glad that they are.

**Chris Philp:** Does my hon. Friend hope that the Data Guardian will focus primarily on ensuring that data is being appropriately used? Does he share my hope that she will go further and seek to actively promote data sharing for use particularly in research applications?

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** I hope for both. It is really important that we do not rest on our laurels and simply say that the powers currently held by the guardian are sufficient. She must be given the right to look forward to ensure that in future, as technology changes and advances—as it inevitably will—she is able to encourage other stakeholders, lawfully and in a secure way, to ensure that the data that is provided by NHS patients is used by the many organisations that would need to share it in a secure and safe way.

**Scott Mann:** In my view, one of two things was going to happen after the Cambridge Analytica scandal: either individuals would be in charge of their own personal data or, as the Government have rightly done, we would have a national database that is under one person’s ownership and guardianship. As my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon South (Chris Philp) said, that information can then be used to promote and encourage technological innovation to help people with some of these conditions. Does my hon. Friend agree that, in rural areas such as his and mine, that would be hugely beneficial?

**Peter Heaton-Jones:** That is absolutely the case. I touched on why the new technology that will be used for healthcare provision is so important, particularly in rural areas such as ours, in North Cornwall and North Devon. We need to ensure that everybody is sure that their data is securely held, processed and used. In areas where these healthcare technology advances would be particularly beneficial, such as my hon. Friend’s constituency and mine, people must not be prohibited or inhibited from giving the necessary data simply because they are not sure how secure it will be. Such a situation might mean that they do not get the healthcare treatment using this new technology that they can specifically benefit from due to the geographic challenges we have discussed in our areas.

Although the role of the National Data Guardian for Health and Social Care was established in November 2014, it was always the intention that it be put on a statutory footing, which is why I am so pleased that we have reached this stage. That was also, I am bound to say, a commitment in the Conservative party’s 2017 manifesto, on which this Government were elected. I am really pleased that here we are, a year on—a relatively short space of time in the proceedings of this place—only a short step away, I hope, from enacting that manifesto commitment.

The Bill has cross-party support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough said, all the Opposition parties have shown their full support for the Bill, which is really important. Devolution was mentioned in an
earlier intervention. It is right that the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Government look closely at adopting a similar position, and they have, if I might say so, the perfect blueprint for doing so thanks to the hard work of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and, before him, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds.

We have here the solution to a potential challenge. If we get this right, it could revolutionise the way we are able to treat people in our health and social care system in the future. Data and privacy are without a doubt two of the big issues of our age. If we get this right, the potential to improve services and patient outcomes is huge. The Bill is a very important step forward in doing that. I wholeheartedly support it.

1.33 pm

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in support of this extremely important private Member’s Bill. To pick up where my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Peter Heaton-Jones) left off, data—data ownership and storage—is one of the big questions that society and this House will have to grapple with in the decades to come. I have noticed when talking to younger constituents how increasingly aware they are of where their data on social media goes and, most importantly, who the owner of that data is. Does the owner remain the subject of that data, or does ownership transfer to whoever is holding it? These are important conceptual issues that I am sure the House is aware they are of where their data on social media goes and, most importantly, who the owner of that data is. Does the owner remain the subject of that data, or does ownership transfer to whoever is holding it? These are important conceptual issues that I am sure the House will have to continue to grapple with in the years ahead, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) has contributed to us moving in this direction.

I first had to come to terms with issues around personal data when I went into public policy research about 10 years ago. Two things became immediately clear. First, although the Government were collecting a lot of data on individuals, the way that they felt obliged to keep that data meant that they were extraordinarily bad at joining it together. We had very good information on children, for example, but rather lousy information on families. Building that context around an individual is absolutely vital if we are to build a decent series of research questions and answers that allow us to interrogate the causes of particular problems, or to see what positive influences in somebody’s life might have led them to avoid certain problems.

On a professional level, although the Bill does not deal with children’s data—children’s safeguarding is covered by different legislation—when I worked on child protection I saw powerfully the consequences of poor data sharing and safeguarding services. I read a large number of serious cases reviews that were published in the event of a child being killed or suffering serious harm, and time after time the findings of those serious case reviews were that agencies had failed to share data at key moments. Time and again, recommendations were made that better information sharing procedures should be created. We had a series of organisations which, albeit with the best intentions, were in effect working in silos, and by not working together they were missing opportunities to protect children, and in some cases to save their lives. That reluctance to share data was not laziness or professional neglect; it was often because agencies were scared of the potential legal consequences of sharing private information with other professional bodies.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman is making a good point. Over the past two or three years we have had this problem of child abuse and so on. One thing that struck me is the fact that agencies do not co-operate with one another or share information in the way they should. As a result, something that could be prevented is not prevented. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Alex Burghart: I absolutely agree, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention. If we create a framework that helps agencies to share information about vulnerable individuals safely, that enables those agencies to become greater than the sum of their parts, and to combine and enhance their professional interrogations, so that they can join the dots and create a true picture of what is happening in someone’s life.

As I saw earlier in my career, however, if done incorrectly such an approach can be taken to dangerous lengths. In about 2008-09, the Government proposed to create a service for children called ContactPoint. The programme was well intentioned, and it intended to bring together all the information on all children in one single place. However, it would have given access to that information to around 350,000 professionals nationwide, and civil rights campaigners immediately became concerned that that would effectively put all information about all children into the public domain, that it would not take long for that information to be out in the public space, and that once there, the process would be irreversible.

Today we are seeing exactly the right civilised and sophisticated approach to data handling. As I understand it, the National Data Guardian will work with professional bodies to ensure that they understand what they can do. She will be in a position to work with the public and ensure that they understand how their data is shared, and how it might be shared in future in order to improve services. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough, I believe that the National Data Guardian will ultimately help people to choose whether they want their data involved in this sort of analysis.

I draw the House’s attention to a very significant initiative taking place in New Zealand. Using this sort of sophisticated data handling arrangement, the New Zealand Government have built the Integrated Data Infrastructure, which brings together pretty much all public, and some private, data held on individuals. It combines it by creating unique identifying numbers for each individual, taking out their names so that all records become anonymous, and then matching the data. This is done in a way that prevents track-back to the individual, while allowing large amounts of interconnected and complex data to be analysed by researchers, so that they can better understand the causes of social complex problems and how it is that some individuals with similar characteristics do not suffer from the dangerous long-term outcomes that some of their peers do.
This is groundbreaking stuff. The fact that the New Zealand Government have managed to do it in such a way as to take the public with them to create a world-class research resource gives us all hope that it can be done. When I talked to the people who lead the project in Wellington, I asked them how they got over the public’s concerns. They said that when they first took it to public consultation a lot of the public said that they rather assumed their data was being used for decent purposes already and found it very strange that their private data was not being used anonymously to solve the big health questions and social problems of the day. Yes, they wanted guarantees that their private information would not end up in the public sphere, but they said, “For goodness’ sake, get on with it.” I think there is a very important lesson for us all in that.

I very much hope the Minister will take a moment or two in her remarks to reflect on how the National Data Guardian may be able to help us in our jobs as MPs. As Members, we often have to handle sensitive information, and we are often responsible for the exchange of sensitive information. I therefore believe the National Data Guardian will perform a service to this House in due course. I am absolutely delighted to support the Bill.

1.42 pm

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). He makes the very important point that if people do not trust the way in which we keep data, they simply will not share it with the people who need it to keep them safe. The Bill is a great way to celebrate the 70th birthday of the NHS. It will be really valuable in protecting patient data in the NHS and will contribute to improving the trust that will enable people to be treated in a more efficient and effective way. Data protection may not be a sexy topic, but it is critically important, as is data sharing, of course.

We have had a data guardian in the NHS since 2014. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) described Dame Fiona as a formidable character. I have known her well for some years now. She chairs the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, with which I have a loving but strained relationship over the future of Horton General Hospital. She will be retiring next year. I do, therefore, have considerable experience of her at work and I know she is extremely exacting. She takes all of her various roles very, very seriously. There could not be a better person to help increase public trust in the way their data is shared. She is as keen as the rest of us for her position to be on a statutory footing. I know the Government want to be treated in a more efficient and effective way. Data protection may not be a sexy topic, but it is critically important, as is data sharing, of course.

I have various local examples of data sharing not going as well as it should. One problem we find in Oxfordshire is that we are close to the boundaries of many other counties, not least Northamptonshire, which my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough has the pleasure to represent. I alluded earlier to the difficulties we have had locally with the very much hope—temporarily—a maternity unit at the Horton General Hospital, where I and many of my constituents were born, and where we hope many more will be in future.

The unit closed temporarily last summer. This means that most Banbury babies are now born at Warwick Hospital, with some being born at the OUHFT, which Dame Fiona chairs. The mothers of the babies who are born at Warwick experience very real difficulties with the data sharing between Banbury and Warwick. All prenatal appointments are supposed to take place in Banbury, but because the two systems do not seem to communicate properly, it transpires that most of my constituents now have to travel to Warwick for those appointments. However, if they choose to have their babies in the John Radcliffe Hospital at the moment, it is part of the same hospital trust so the communication is easier and that seems to work relatively well.

I turn to care at the other end of life and our award-winning neck of femur service as my second example. The average age of patients treated there is about 85, so it is very much the other end of the age spectrum from maternity. The difficulty in this instance is communication between the hospital and adult social care. The service is fantastic—it was first in the country last year for neck of femur. It specialises in providing a pathway in which patients are greeted at the hospital, put on a special mattress, X-rayed in a special way and treated in a special way. The aim is to get these elderly people out of hospital as quickly as possible with the right care package at the other end.

When I was talking to the very effective nurse—we should be so proud of these nurses—who runs the ward where most of the patients spend most of their time in hospital, she said that when she looks at the postcodes as the patients come on to her ward, her heart sinks if they live in Northamptonshire. As my hon. Friend knows, Northamptonshire is a truly wonderful place and bits of it are very close to Banbury—in fact, my parents live in Northamptonshire, just up the road from Banbury—so it is obvious that many Northamptonshire postcode patients will be treated in the Horton General. The difficulty is that when they come in, the communication with adult social care services is not nearly as good. We have an Oxfordshire person in that unit all day every day, working to move these patients on and get them out as soon as possible, which we know is in their best interests in health terms, but we do not have such links with Northamptonshire. The nurse who runs the unit told me recently that she can get Oxfordshire patients through in as little as four days—with them having had a really major operation—whereas Northamptonshire patients can take as long as 20 days. It is such a shame, and that is why this data sharing is so important to people’s actual health outcomes.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill) feels strongly about GP data and the ways in which GPs communicate with hospitals. That was what led her to drive forward this reform when she came into Parliament. GPs talk to me an awful lot about the way that they keep data. I had an email today from one of the practice managers of a GP surgery in Bicester, who told me that an unintended consequence of general data protection regulation was that whereas he used to be able to charge £50 for solicitors’ photocopying, he cannot do so now under GDPR so the practice is losing out. I will write to Ministers separately about that—[Interruption.] The Minister sighs weakly—she hears an awful lot from me, largely about the Horton General Hospital.
In short, as I do not wish to detain the Minister any further, I am proud to have been able to speak in support of the Bill. It is an important reform that will provide some level of trust among the public at a time when people are more cautious about sharing their data, but when it is ever more important that we use their data effectively.

1.49 pm

Alan Mak (Havant) (Con): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis). I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) on all his hard work taking the Bill through the House, and I commend him for steering it through Committee without amendment, which I think reflects the importance that the whole House places on this topic.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough has said, the National Data Guardian, Dame Fiona Caldicott, has already done much work to promote good practice in handling medical data, and I am sure that putting her role on a statutory footing will enhance that further. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury and others in paying tribute to Dame Fiona, who has played an excellent role and been a strong voice for patients as our first National Data Guardian.

I am particularly pleased to speak in the debate because of my long-standing interest in the fourth industrial revolution, and because of the report I recently released, supported by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, on how we can better use technology and data to improve the NHS’s performance. This week, as we celebrate the 70th anniversary of the NHS, there is no better time not only to look back at its successes, but to look forward and consider how we can safeguard its future through the use of good data.

The NHS has been a long-standing user of good data, even since its infancy. In the 1950s it was data from 20 London hospitals that first proved the link between smoking and lung cancer, which has certainly saved many lives in the years since. Fast-forward to 2018, and the potential for using medical data to improve lives has certainly grown exponentially.

Despite the clear and unquestionable potential of the fourth industrial revolution, and the new technologies associated with it, many members of the public remain sceptical about its benefits. They, like me, have seen a number of attempts to digitise health services fail, from the national programme of IT under the previous Labour Government to the WannaCry hack last year. There is still much work to do to win over a sceptical public. That is why my argument, and my support for the Bill, is clear. I believe that shared data saves lives, and I believe that the National Data Guardian has an important role to play in spreading that message.

One of the principles of the National Data Guardian is the need to build a dialogue with the public about how we all want information about us to be used. Although the NHS is rightly introducing a wide range of digital services, I have no doubt that the service most coveted by patients and our constituents, especially those in the smartphone generation, is the long-awaited NHS smartphone app. Anyone who has used NHS digital services will know that a wide variety of options are available to patients.

One of the key recommendations of my report was that the NHS should introduce a one-stop shop, with an overarching app that would allow patients across the whole of England to book appointments, order repeat prescriptions, control access to data and seek advice on medical problems. The app would operate 24/7 so that patients could access the NHS at their fingertips, from the comfort of their sofa or their place of work.

My long-term vision is for a smart NHS that personalises medicine and treatment, and provides advice in one integrated place. That is why I was delighted that the Secretary of State recently announced that he will be taking forward plans to build this new NHS app, to ensure that the smartphone generation have access to healthcare at their fingertips. As the Secretary of State, the Minister and their colleagues at the Department of Health and Social Care begin the work of designing and implementing the app, I think that the National Data Guardian can play an important role in shaping its future. She should call for full integration of the app with paperless records to ensure that digitisation takes place across the whole NHS. Only by ensuring that the app is available to everybody can the NHS reach its full potential, delivering all the services envisioned in my report.

In conclusion, the healthcare of tomorrow will be powered by artificial intelligence, big data, automation and increasing digital connectivity. That is why the NHS must be a global leader in this field. At the same time, we must ensure that informed consent is not put at risk, and that the patient voice is kept at the heart of all treatment. Key to all that is the role of the National Data Guardian, which is why I am very keen to see her role placed on a statutory footing. I am therefore delighted to support the Bill.

1.54 pm

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): It is always a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak), who speaks with great authority about technology, which is really what the Bill is all about. I pay tribute not only to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), but to my constituency neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). He has done many things in this House over the years, but I think it fair to say that this is probably the first time he has managed to take a Bill to Third Reading, so today is a historic moment in his parliamentary career.

One of the things of which my hon. Friend can be particularly proud is the fact that his Bill has managed to unite so many different charities in its support: the Academy of Medical Sciences, Arthritis Research UK, the Association of Medical Research Charities, Asthma UK, the British Heart Foundation, Cancer Research UK, Genetic Alliance UK, Macmillan Cancer Support, MQ, the Richmond Group of Charities, and Wellcome. That is an eclectic mix of health charities, which I think speaks volumes about the way in which the Bill is perceived by the charitable sector and the difference that the sector believes it will make.
I see the Bill as a big step forward, but I also see it as very much a tidying-up measure that puts on a statutory footing something that is, in large part, already happening. This whole approach makes eminent sense to me, not least because the effective use of health and care data and information has the potential to contribute significantly to improved outcomes for individuals and service users.

That can happen in many different ways. For example, sharing an individual’s health and care data between all the providers involved in that individual’s care will ensure that the best possible care package can be delivered. Too many people with serious conditions such as dementia have to tell the same story to multiple people and services involved in their care. Effective and appropriate data sharing could eliminate an unnecessary burden which causes distress not just to the individual concerned but to their loved ones—their friends and families.

Th at, I think, is a welcome step forward in its own right, but it is also the case that researchers will have much better access to appropriate data, which is crucial to the development of new medicines and treatments.

If commissioners have access to the data that they need to make decisions about the best use of their resources locally and nationally, services can be provided and located where they are most needed. The impact of available funds can also be maximised and budgets fully optimised. I do not think anyone could possibly object to that.

The Bill also presents a real opportunity for us to achieve something about which my local clinical commissioning groups, Nene and Corby, talk to me all the time—better integration between health and social care services—which is very welcome in itself. That, I think, is where our direction of travel should be if we are to improve patient care.

I hope that the Bill will also help with the prevention agenda, in which the use of technology is clearly paramount. Like many other people out there, I am the proud owner of a Fitbit, which has made me think much more carefully about some of the decisions that I make from day to day in relation to my health and wellbeing. I now think about being physical, getting active, being out there, and doing the right thing to take care of my own health. Any measure that places a greater onus on individuals to take responsibility for their health and care needs can only be a good thing. It means putting the patient in control, while at the same time providing suitable protections to ensure that people’s data is handled sensitively and with care.

The Bill is timely as well. I think that all Members recognise the significance of the excellent care that the NHS provides for all our constituents day in, day out, and I pay tribute to the remarkable NHS staff in Corby and East Northamptonshire, who work tirelessly to make people better and meet their health needs. I commend that quality of care. Sometimes Members of Parliament only hear about things that have gone wrong, but the vast majority of care that we see in the health service is excellent. One of the things that often frustrates me in this place is how often we debate the issue of money. Obviously money is important—it is vital that we ensure that the health service has the financial resources that it needs in order to provide the care that people require—but I think we should focus more on outcomes. It is outcomes that really matter, not necessarily monetary value.

I believe that it is in the greater use of technology and the integration of health and social care that the future of healthcare lies. Of course we must ensure that the health service has the resources that it needs, but we should make the most of technology, maximising the opportunities that it presents to improve patient care. I think that in the next 70 years, that will be one of the big focuses in the NHS.

1.59 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I am conscious of time so will be brief.

I welcome this Bill’s Third Reading and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) on getting it this far—and, indeed, it is just the first of his private Member’s Bills on the Order Paper today. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), too; she has also played a huge role. I get to talk to her quite a lot in her current role, although, sadly, because of that post she cannot say anything about this Bill today.

I hope the Minister in her closing remarks will reflect a bit on how she sees the guardian being used as a champion of patients and of ensuring that their data are protected: given that this Bill covers some of the most sensitive data people have—their healthcare data—how we can make sure we get the benefits such new technologies offer to be able to analyse and find trends and patterns of disease we might never have found before; and how patients can be reassured that someone is acting as their advocate and champion in ensuring those data are used only for reasonable purposes, which we all want. It is right that we are looking to pass this law to enshrine such a role in statute; being the guardian of data, particularly across the NHS, is a key role, and I hope this Bill receives its Third Reading.

I took on board the explanation by the Bill’s promoter of why it says it covers England and Wales, even though it will cover only England, but I hope a relationship can be developed with the devolved health systems so that the data sharing benefits the entire UK. Given the time, however, and the fact that the Minister will wish to respond to the debate, and other Members wish to speak, I will conclude by saying that I fully support the Bill.

2.2 pm

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): As many Members have said, this is the 70th anniversary week of the NHS, and there is no better time to talk about this Bill. I will focus in my brief speech on three areas.

The first is that personal medical data about ourselves and our families is, to many of us, the most important thing we have. It is personal and emotional information, which if stolen would be incredibly valuable to criminals or nefarious organisations that may wish to use it for their own purposes. It is therefore critically important that by establishing this post in statute we strengthen the security of that personal information and data that we all cherish so much.

Connected with that is the question of trust: trust from our constituents—the people of this country—that their data will be handled securely in a world where online crime and other dangers to that data are proliferating...
far beyond what we could have imagined 10, 15 or 20 years ago. Establishing the post in statute will significantly improve the trust individuals have in the system and in the protection of their own personal data.

Finally, there is the question of accountability. One of the difficult aspects of being a Member of Parliament is that we are often called to account for things we do not control, or indeed the Government do not control. This Bill sets out the accountability of the individual responsible for safeguarding individuals’ data. That accountability helps contribute to trust, and what better way to achieve that than by establishing the post in statute?

We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Alan Mak) about the importance of technology in the NHS, and indeed in the world, today. The NHS’s data source—aided not just by the people of this country and their various ailments but by the structure of the NHS—is an incredibly valuable resource for improving the lives of people in this country, because of what we can do with that data in the context of technology. The Bill will help to strengthen that position.

2.5 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is a great honour to speak in the debate on this Bill. There are three things that I would like to say, and I shall say them very briefly as I know that others wish to speak. First, I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis), who is not in her place at the moment. Many of the issues that are relevant to the north of my constituency are the same as the ones that she has raised. Her comments on the transfer of data between the Horton, Chipping Norton and Warwick hospitals apply to me as much as they do her, so I will not repeat them. I will simply associate myself with her comments.

Secondly, I want to pay tribute to the hard work of all the NHS staff in the Witney and West Oxfordshire constituency, particularly at the community hospitals at Witney and Chipping Norton and at the GP surgeries. It is extraordinary that, in this day and age, they are unable to share their data freely, that people therefore have to repeat their stories to different practitioners and that those practitioners cannot see all the relevant medical records quickly and easily online, as they should be able to. We should enable that to happen as soon as possible.

Thirdly, technology has a huge role to play in ensuring that we wring every last penny out of the NHS budget. As my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak) rightly said, we should be getting to a place where people can have an app that enables them to look at their records, book appointments and hold consultations over the internet using their phones. That will help to save their time and spread the budget as well as we can to ensure that we get best value. It will also help us to make the best use of the hard-working staff who do so much in our NHS.

2.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to the debate today. I particularly want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr Bone). I cannot believe that this is the first private Member’s Bill that he has taken through to Third Reading, as he has had so many. I am delighted to have collaborated with him on achieving this. It is quite an achievement. He was typically generous about me in his comments, which was completely undeserved. He was quite right when he said that thanks need to go to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury St Edmunds (Jo Churchill), who was the inspiration behind the Bill.

I want briefly to set out why the Government view the Bill as an important measure and why we are keen to see it progress and to put the National Data Guardian on to a statutory footing. The Government are committed to ensuring that the health and adult social care system in England realises the full benefits of sharing health and care data in a safe, secure and legal way. We have talked a lot today about the benefits of such data sharing. However, if data and information are to be used effectively to support better health and care outcomes, it is essential that the public have trust and confidence that safeguards are in place to protect the data from inappropriate use. That is the ethos behind the establishment of the National Data Guardian. The guardian will be an independent, authoritative voice for individuals on how their data should be used. At the heart of this is the relationship between health providers and individuals, and we need to maintain an appropriate balance between safeguarding and privacy as well as underlining the serious principle of informed consent by patients.

I should like to clarify the scope of the legislation. The National Data Guardian’s remit covers all health and adult social care data, which is defined in the Bill as essentially the same as “patient information” under section 251 of the National Health Service Act 2006. That basically enables the National Data Guardian to influence anything that impacts on the processing of health and adult social care data held by all the organisations listed in the Bill. This will enable the promotion of good challenge and the building of assurance across the health care system, as well as enabling the system to access the data it needs in order to run safely, effectively and efficiently.

I cannot emphasise enough the fact that the voice of the patient and the service user is really the paramount principle under which the National Data Guardian will operate, notwithstanding the fact that she will be working through the use of guidance to providers. It is basically taking the position of what is in the best interests of the patient. In so doing, we hope that the guidance she issues will establish confidence on the part of the public that their data is being used effectively.

Much has already been said today about the role of Dame Fiona Caldicott, who is the first National Data Guardian. She has been described as phenomenal, energetic and influential, but I wish to take this opportunity to recognise the enormous contribution she has made. I am sure she will take full advantage of the statutory powers that will follow once the Bill reaches the statute book.

I am delighted to have the support of the Opposition on the Bill, because the use of data sharing is essential to secure the best possible health treatment for all patients. The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) expressed the desire that the National Data Guardian should have real teeth. I emphasise again that she will act in the interests of patients, and that will mean challenging providers. As we all know,
some providers are instinctively cautious and defensive about data sharing, and the real challenge is that patients are sure, thanks to the National Data Guardian’s advocacy, that it is the right thing to do. Nor should there be any escape for health professionals and providers.

The National Data Guardian will, as the hon. Gentleman said, use her powers by issuing guidance, and the clear expectation is that everyone will abide by that guidance. We see the aim as one of changing organisational behaviour rather than having rules. The fact that the National Data Guardian will produce an annual report on how she is discharging her obligations, and how the health sector is reacting, will be a powerful tool. We often find that transparency can be much more effective than rules, regulations and laws. Once behaviour that is not delivering the outcomes that we intend through legislation is highlighted, the public embarrassment will be more effective than many of the tools that we have at our disposal. It is heartening to see the interest in the Bill in the Chamber, and we have heard some individual examples of poor practice. I am sure we will have plenty if anyone does not abide by Dame Fiona’s advice.

We expect the National Data Guardian to use her annual report to implement further guidance. We fully expect that the duty for adult health and social care organisations and providers to have regard to that guidance will also be taken into account by the Care Quality Commission and the Information Commissioner’s Office, so it is not just the Government and the National Data Guardian that can hold them to account. We expect a serious change in behaviour in the future.

The National Data Guardian will look at her own operating approaches to see what more can be done to ensure that the role has teeth. That is also part of the reason for putting the role on a statutory footing. The fact that her advice will have legal clout will give it more teeth. She will have day-to-day communication mechanisms at her disposal to highlight areas of good and poor practice, and the statutory duty to consult people she considers appropriate before publishing guidance. That will fuel an important debate about behaviour in this area.

Other issues that have arisen in the debate today and in Committee include concerns as to why children’s social care data is not covered by the Bill. I would like to explain the reasoning behind that and why it is not a weakness in the Bill. Data relating to children’s social care has its own safeguards and protections, which operate under a different legal framework from adult health and social care. Those safeguards and protections are governed by their own statutory guidance, and we would not want to include anything that conflicts with established guidelines.

The context and imperative for using and sharing data to safeguard children is also different, and the most important consideration is whether sharing information is likely to safeguard and protect a child. That is an important point, because with children safeguarding trumps privacy and personal ownership.

Rather than extending the National Data Guardian’s role to cover children’s social care data, action should remain targeted elsewhere on improving timely and proportionate information sharing to keep children safe. Officials in the Department for Education and the Department of Health and Social Care have reached a sensible interpretation of the Bill, which would not preclude the National Data Guardian from engaging constructively with the Department for Education on adult social care data and its interaction with children’s social care data. There has been an exchange of letters between the Departments to formalise that agreement. On safeguarding children, the powers in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 are the mechanism for the Departments to act and to share information.

We worked across Government to amend the Data Protection Act 2018 to introduce safeguarding as a condition by which information can be shared without consent to keep children safe. We will continue to work with local authorities to consider and monitor the impact of the National Data Guardian in this space, where it is appropriate to work outside the remit of the statutory powers set out in the Act in a way that is consistent with the law and regulations as they currently apply to sharing data on children. We will keep a watching brief on that but, at this stage, we should not do anything to disrupt established obligations. We can establish good practice in this area through sensible discussion between the National Data Guardian, the DFE and the Department of Health and Social Care, which is entirely consistent with how we co-ordinate the respective obligations of children’s social care and adult social care services.

I have very little time, but I will touch on one or two other issues before concluding. There was a brief discussion earlier on the territorial extent of the Bill, and I can confirm that the Bill applies only to England. The Bill technically applies to England and Wales because of how we approach legislation in this place, but it extends only to England.

I can also confirm that public health data is included in the remit of the Bill, so that data will also be shared. I also confirm that the Bill covers local authorities where they are actioning services with regard to adult social care and, of course, public health.

I conclude by confirming again the Government’s commitment to this Bill and our desire to see it succeed. I am confident that the Bill will achieve the aims my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough and all hon. Members have set out. After today’s important stage, I hope the Bill will make swift progress and will receive Royal Assent as soon as possible.

2.18 pm

Mr Bone: With the leave of the House, I thank the parliamentary counsel, the Clerks of the House and officials at the Department of Health and Social Care for their assistance in preparing the Bill. I also thank, from my office, Jordan Ayres for the research and Helen Harrison for the drafting of the Bill. I also thank the eight Back-Bench MPs who have taken the opportunity to participate, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Corby (Tom Pursglove) and for Torbay (Kevin Foster), both of whom sat on the Public Bill Committee.

The last thing to say on the Bill before, hopefully, it is read for the Third time is that, if it makes it all the way through and becomes an Act of Parliament, let us hope it is referred to as the Churchill Act.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): There might already be one or two Acts with that name.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.
National Living Wage (Extension to Young People) Bill

Second Reading

2.19 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

It is a pleasure to have the chance to present my Bill calling on the Government to extend the national living wage to workers between the ages of 18 and 25. It is also a pleasure to follow the Bills of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon North (Mr Reed), and the hon. Members for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) and for Wellingborough (Mr Bone) on what has been a productive sitting Friday. I wish those Members all the best as their Bills progress to the next stages.

My Bill seeks to address the policy introduced in 2016 whereby under-25s in minimum wage jobs can be paid less per hour than their older colleagues—even those performing the same tasks. My Bill would ensure that the Government’s national living wage, currently £7.83 per hour for those over 25, would apply to all workers over the age of 18—the group I am targeting currently receive a reduced minimum of £5.90 per hour. This simple change would have a big impact on many young people’s lives, helping to tackle the generational divide opening up in our country.

The impact of the current policy is keenly felt by young people in my constituency, many of whom have written to me in support of the Bill. Katie, for example, was paid just £5.25 per hour when she started working at a major high street retailer at 18. She told me that young people in her workplace were often expected to do the most difficult tasks and in some cases look after entire departments, yet they still received a lower wage than their older colleagues. She is now 22, with five years’ retail experience, but is still paid less than others. She says she feels unappreciated and has put off the possibility of buying a house, and she is frustrated that she cannot provide financial support to her parents.

Another Halifax resident, Imran, started working at 16, but because he was paid less than older colleagues he found it difficult to be able to afford his work-related expenses. He was disappointed that, even though he did the same—or often more—work than people who were older than him, he got paid a lot less.

Research by the House of Commons Library shows that Katie and Imran’s experiences are shared by thousands across the country. It has calculated that an 18-year-old working full-time on the minimum wage will earn £3,774 a year less than an equivalent colleague aged 25 or over. That gap is expected to widen as the rate for over-25s rises towards £9 an hour in 2022. Of course I welcome that rise, but I am very uncomfortable with the disparity.

Having probed the Government on a number of occasions for the rationale for such a high age threshold, I have been given a number of justifications, varying in both intention and credibility. Comments by the then Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, the right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock), shortly after the policy was introduced inevitably rubbed salt in the wounds of young workers. He said it was “an active policy choice” not to cover the under-25s. He went on to say: “Anybody who has employed people knows that younger people, especially in their first jobs, are not as productive, on average.”

That prompted understandable frustration from young people and embarrassment for the Government when a Minister later conceded in written parliamentary questions that “there are no official statistics, estimating the productivity of workers by their age.”

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing a slot in which to debate this Bill. When she has been probing the Government on their decision on the national living wage for the under-25s, did they ever give any indication that it was their intent to give a housing reduction or a utility bill reduction for those under 25, to reflect the fact that they want to pay them less?

Holly Lynch: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. He is right—that has never been forthcoming in the Government’s justification. However, it is a point that is made to me by young people time and again. They do not get a reduction in any of their outgoing costs because of their age, so why should they see a reduction in their pay packets?

When I asked the right hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) for a debate on this issue when he was the Leader of the House, he replied: “I...think it is important to do everything that we can to incentivise employers to take on young people.”—[Official Report, 28 April 2016; Vol. 608, c. 1564.]

Although we all want to see lower youth unemployment, the Federation of Small Businesses has pointed out that the Government’s approach could see employers wandering into legally precarious territory. In evidence to the Low Pay Commission, the FSB said: “our survey data suggests that some businesses may focus their recruitment on the under 25s. However by doing this they run the risk of potentially breaching age discrimination legislation, which should lead many employers to re-evaluate this stance.”

An employer that actively seeks to recruit under-25s to cut wage costs will almost certainly fall foul of age discrimination legislation.

The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, and section 5 recognises age as one of those characteristics. It is direct discrimination if, because of a protected characteristic, one person is treated less favourably than another. The House of Commons Library has confirmed that to recruit workers on the basis of their age would constitute direct age discrimination.

Ministers often claim that other countries also discriminate by age yet, in the entire developed world, only Greece has taken a similar approach and set the age threshold as high as 25. France pays the full rate from 18 onwards, as does Germany, and even in the significantly more deregulated US there is no difference in wages based on age, apart from the option to pay workers under 20 a lower rate for their first few months of employment.

The Government continue to insist that any rise in the wages of young people risks “pricing them out of employment” yet there are serious flaws with keeping wages low to supposedly help the young, not least that employers that actively seek to recruit under-25s to cut wage costs risk falling foul of age discrimination legislation. Any
employer interviewing for a role is legally required to choose the best candidate for the position, regardless of age. Any monetary incentive can only be acted on if the employer discriminates against older applicants. It is simply not going to work.

The point made to me by young people time and again, and which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) just outlined, is that under-25s get no discounts on utility bills or rent, food is not cheaper for them, and there is no discount on the transport that they use to get to work. Why should their younger age be reflected in a smaller pay packet when it is not reflected in their outgoing costs? A recent survey by the Young Women’s Trust found that a quarter of young people in England and Wales have to borrow to make ends meet. For those people, a decent wage is desperately needed.

Thankfully, many companies recognise the contributions made by under-25s and are opting to pay them more than the minimum wage. Nestlé in my constituency employs up to 1,000 people and was accredited by the Living Wage Foundation in June 2014 as the first mainstream manufacturer in the UK to become a living wage employer, paying all its workers the Living Wage Foundation’s living wage from the age of 18. Nestlé said: “As a major employer in Halifax and across the UK, we know this is the right thing to do. Not only does it benefit our people but also the communities they live and work in.”

The company knows that it is important to maintain morale in the workforce and that young workers deserve respect.

The Living Wage Foundation is explicit in outlining that the living wage should apply to everyone over the age of 18. The Government did not decide to rename the national minimum wage the national living wage by accident, so I ask them to consider adopting the Living Wage Foundation’s principle that fair pay for fair work starts at 18, in the same way that they have adopted its name.

My private Member’s Bill will help to restore the dignity of young workers and assist people such as Katie and Imran to get a much deserved pay rise. I thank the trade unions Unison and Unite, my trade union the GMB, and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I also thank the Living Wage Foundation, the Young Women’s Trust, Young Labour and my incredibly hard-working parliamentary assistant, Matt Dawson. As one of Parliament’s younger MPs—although I confess I am ageing rapidly, Mr Deputy Speaker—I am pleased to have been able to give this campaign a platform once again, in the hope that the Government are listening.

It was interesting to hear the observations of the hon. Member for Halifax (Holly Lynch) on what would, rightly, happen to an employer who decided to, shall we say, put aside a candidate aged 26 or 27 who was more skilled for the job in favour of a 22 or 23-year-old, purely so that that employer could take advantage of the discount deal.

It would be interesting if the Government produced some analysis of what would happen if, instead of an age-based system—we would all accept the difference at 18, because there is a difference with employing children—we switched to a system in which a different rate applied in a first period of employment. First, that might be a period in which people are training and building up skills, as we already reflect in the different rate for apprentices; and secondly, that might encourage employers to take back into employment people who have been out of employment for a while. That would be fairer than a system in which someone can work for four or five years and be quite experienced, but stay on a different rate. By that point, there is clearly not going to be any productivity difference between someone aged 23 who has worked for five years and someone who is 28 and has worked for five years. If we are being sensible, we are not going to see a difference.

Those are some of the things that could be sensibly considered. If the Bill had perhaps had more time for debate, we could have explored, for example, the differences between 18 and 21, applying the rate around training and employers being prepared to sponsor people to go to university. It is positive that we are having this debate and that we have such a positive image of young people. Too often, there is this idea in the media—

2.30 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 11(2)) Ordered, That the debate be resumed on Friday 23 November.

Business without Debate

LEGALISATION OF CANNABIS (MEDICINAL PURPOSES) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

LOCAL HEALTH SCRUTINY BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November.

EMERGENCY RESPONSE DRIVERS (PROTECTIONS) BILL

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November.
PRISONS (SUBSTANCE TESTING) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

HOMELESSNESS (END OF LIFE CARE) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

EUROPEAN UNION WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT (PUBLIC VOTE) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

SUPERVISED DRUG CONSUMPTION FACILITIES BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

HOLOCAUST (RETURN OF CULTURAL OBJECTS) (AMENDMENT) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

JUNE BANK HOLIDAY (CREATION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE COMMISSION BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

HOSPITAL (PARKING CHARGES AND BUSINESS RATES) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

VOTER REGISTRATION (NO. 2) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS (LIMITATION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (EXTENSION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

POSTAL VOTING BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

TYRES (BUSES AND COACHES) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE (CO-FUNDING AND CO-PAYMENT) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (BORROWING AND INVESTMENT) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

PRINCIPAL LOCAL AUTHORITIES (GROUNDS FOR ABOLITION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.
COASTAL PATH (DEFINITION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS AND RETIREMENTS (AGE LIMITS) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

BBC LICENCE FEE (CIVIL PENALTY) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE (DEFINITION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

BENEFITS AND PUBLIC SERVICES (RESTRICTION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

ELECTRONIC CIGARETTES (REGULATION) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

KEW GARDENS (LEASES) (NO. 2) BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

RIVERS AUTHORITIES AND LAND DRAINAGE BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

WILD ANIMALS IN CIRCUSES BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

FORENSIC SCIENCE REGULATOR BILL
Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.
Bill to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October.

ANIMAL WELFARE (SERVICE ANIMALS) BILL
Bill read a Second time; to stand committed to a Public Bill Committee (Standing Order No. 63).

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Congratulations, Sir Oliver.
Music Festivals: Drug Safety Testing

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

2.37 pm

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): I rise to speak about drug safety testing at music festivals. I start by letting all hon. and right hon. Members know that this is not a debate about legalising drugs. We could have that debate, but not today. This is about how we can put safety first, take dangerous substances out of circulation, save lives, make festivals safer and more pleasant places, and probably undermine drug dealers as well—and why would we not want to do that?

In May this year, in Bristol, the much loved annual Love Saves The Day festival came to town. It was sunny, loads of people enjoyed themselves—and nobody died. I believe that this is in part because the festival organisers worked with Avon and Somerset police and with Bristol City Council to ensure that the Loop drug safety testing project, with its trained scientists and drug counsellors, was able to operate on-site.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): My hon. Friend made the most important point—nobody died. At so many other festivals, many young people are losing their lives.

Thangam Debbonaire: My hon. Friend makes exactly the point that I am coming on to. The contrast between Love Saves The Day and another festival that weekend was that nobody died in Bristol while at the other festival there was no drug safety testing, and sadly—tragically—two people did die and 15 others were hospitalised.

The Loop operates a model called MAST—multi-agency safety testing—that was developed by Dr Fiona Measham, professor of criminology at Durham University and co-director of the Loop. I pay tribute to Dr Measham and all the people who are working on this project, from the police and Home Office scientists who tested drugs on site at festivals primarily for evidential and intelligence purposes, to service users. I want to emphasise this: service users who are given their unique identifier number and return about half an hour later to get the test results. Those substances are tested by PhD chemists who are highly qualified and trained, as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith) said, using four types of forensic analyses and linked to a computer database containing a regularly updated reference standard library of all known legal and illegal substances, including new psychoactive substances, also known as legal highs.

People return with their unique identifier number and are given the test results as part of a 15-minute individually tailored brief intervention by an experienced healthcare worker. Harm reduction information is contextualised with people’s medical and drug-using history, as well as the test results. No drugs are returned to service users. I want to emphasise this: service users do not receive drugs back from the Loop. Almost all samples are destroyed during testing and any leftover particles are disposed of by the police at regular intervals throughout the festival. I have seen the complicated bits and pieces they use to ensure that absolutely no one gets their hands on something.

A police presence is welcomed in the Loop lab throughout the day. That allows the Loop to share information and intelligence onsite, which can help to spread messages about dangerous substances in circulation. For that to work, the police and local authorities such as Bristol City Council agree to a tolerance zone of non-enforcement in and around the testing venue.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that with drugs at festivals, as with a whole range of issues, taking the attitude that we should just say no and refuse to acknowledge that there is anything we could or should do apart from that is abrogating our responsibility to keep our citizens safe?

Thangam Debbonaire: I thank my hon. Friend for his comment. I certainly agree that the policy of just saying no has a huge number of limitations, one of them being that it does not seem to be working. If we take the corresponding example of sexual abstinence, “just say no” was promoted as a method of keeping teenagers from getting pregnant in America for many years. That has demonstrably failed, and there are similar examples of why it does not work for drugs either.

The non-enforcement zone just around the testing venue allows service users to engage fully and productively. Drug safety testing does not assist in the supply of drugs or condone or encourage drug use; I want to
reiterate that. There is no safe level of consumption of any drug, and that includes the legal ones of alcohol and tobacco. Giving information is what helps people to make safer choices.

All those who use the service are, by definition, already in possession of a substance. If the drug is not tested, the person concerned will probably consume the drug without any information at all; if it is tested, they may consume it if they have more of the same substance, but with more information about what is in it so they can make a safer choice; or they may consume a smaller dose than they would have otherwise; or they may not consume it at all. In many cases, people hand in more of the same substance, along with helpful intelligence for the police and drugs agencies about it.

Tonia Antoniazzi (Gower) (Lab): I am concerned about drugs on the streets of city centres. Does my hon. Friend agree that many police forces would welcome the opportunity to explore safety testing in city centres across the UK, particularly on student nights out or at weekends?

Thangam Debbonaire: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and I would dearly love there to be provision for drug safety testing in the centres of Bristol, Swansea or Manchester so that people who are intending to take substances—they are going to do that anyway—can have safety information and make safer choices. As I said, such testing often takes dangerous substances out of circulation and disrupts drug dealers’ business models, which is something I am very keen on doing.

The Loop usually finds that one in 10 tested substances are not what the user thought they were—unfortunately, those drugs can turn out to include concrete, boracic acid and various other unpleasant substances. One in two service users, after hearing about the strength of their sample and its dosage, state that they will take a smaller quantity of the drug in future. One in five people dispose of further substances in their possession—that is important as it takes out of circulation something dangerous that otherwise would not only have remained in circulation but would have been consumed.

Jeff Smith: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that although drug use in this country is relatively static, drug deaths are actually rising? That can only be attributed to an increase in the toxicity of those drugs, and we need young people to have that information. If they are going to take drugs, we need them to be aware that the drugs they take might be toxic.

Thangam Debbonaire: I agree with my hon. Friend. Drug use is not increasing, but drug-related deaths are—they are the highest they have ever been, according to campaigning organisations. I find it troubling that young people are taking things when they do not know what is in them, and the message “just say no” is clearly not working. We need to think again about how we keep young people safe.

I will not go into detail about the various aspects of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 that I would like to see changed—that is for another day. Clearly, however, some police forces, local authorities and festival organisers are finding ways to have a formal agreement and memorandum of understanding about the Loop providing drug safety information. Other authorities are not so clear, which means that people are dying—these are not just young people; some who have died at festivals of drug-related causes have been over 24 years of age, but such deaths are tragic at whatever age they occur.

According to data provided to me by the Loop, one in three people at clubs and festivals take illegal drugs—as my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi) said, this is also about clubs and city centres. One in 20 16 to 24-year-olds have used MDMA, sometimes known as ecstasy, in the past year. MDMA makes up the majority of drugs that need testing at festivals—55% of all drugs tested at Love Saves the Day in Bristol were MDMA. However, the strength of that MDMA and the potential risks of death and serious harm are rising alarmingly. That was confirmed by Bristol City Council’s drugs lead, Jody Clark, and I thank Jody for his pioneering work, his bravery and his commitment to the safety of young people.

As has been said, drug use is not increasing yet drug-related deaths are. However, let me reiterate that at Love Save the Day, nobody died. That same month, at another festival where there was no drug safety testing, there were 15 hospital admissions due to drugs and two young people died. That has happened at other festivals as well. In a Bristol nightclub earlier this year, where there is currently no drug safety testing, there was a death from a Tesla MDMA tablet, and there have been deaths at other clubs across the country. Tesla pills are high-potency, and contain 240 mg of MDMA, compared with the current average of 120 mg. That in turn compares with the 1990s dosage, when 50 to 80 mg was the average.

Would it not be better if we could prevent that harm, and if the parents of those young people—they were mostly young people—never had to hear the words of every parent’s nightmare? Is it enough just to say “just say no”? Preaching abstinence in sexual activity as a means of preventing pregnancy demonstrably fails. Preaching abstinence in drug use is also not working, and neither is the advice that I heard a Minister give in this Chamber last July, which was that one should never take anything that cannot be bought in a high-street chemist. For a start, heroin can be prescribed, and indeed is consumed in high street chemists under certain circumstances. Other very strong, very addictive and very dangerous drugs, such as Tramadol and Fentanyl, are also prescribed in high street chemists. Therefore, just saying that what is provided and prescribed in a high street chemist is safe and everything else is not is not helpful information for young people. They can work this stuff out.

Alcohol, entirely legal, is provided in this very place, yet it is deadly for many. It is a leading cause of breast and bowel cancer—cause, not correlation—and a contributing factor to violence and depression. But at least with alcohol there is information and regulation. For consumers of illegal substances this does not exist. I believe people would prefer to know what they were consuming. Ironically, drug safety testing, such as that by the Loop, means that people intending to consume illegal drugs at festivals are given much more safety information and options for referral to treatment than those consuming the legal drug of alcohol at festivals. I would like that to be corrected as well, but that is for another day.
Drugs, legal or otherwise, have risks, but people still use them. When they know what is in a substance they are intending to take, this gives them information. Again, this applies whether they are legal or illegal. When an illegal substance is tested by trained scientists via a project like the Loop, people cannot get that sample back. Instead, they get accurate information about the drug’s content and safety.

Giving everyone clear information about the substances they intend to consume does not make it easier to take illicit substances and nor does it eliminate all risk—alcohol licensing and labelling still do not prevent all alcohol-related harms—but the Bristol experience has shown that providing information about illegal drugs can be done within our current laws. Other police forces, councils and festivals are not clear on how to do this, however, and here the Government can help. There is no need to change or review the law, just a need to provide clarity on the grey areas that some police forces find difficult and to provide formal recognition of the status quo and ensure that all relevant parties—police forces, festival organisers, local councillors and licensing bodies—know it.

Clubs could be asked to contribute to the drug safety testing in city centres that my colleagues and I wish to see. It could be a part of their licences that they should contribute to funding and work with the police, the council, public health and drug projects to help save lives and take dangerous substances out of circulation. In an ideal world, what I would like, and what I would like the Minister to consider, is that all licences for such festivals, and if possible for all clubs, are made conditional on the availability of drug safety testing, and for licence holders to work with police, public health, the night time economy, drug treatment and safety organisations to fund and ensure this. The Government need to get behind this and not stand on the side lines. Drug safety testing deserves Government clarity and support. Young people deserve clarity and support. The parents of young people deserve clarity and support.

I will conclude by asking what I hope are two simple questions of the Minister. I hope he is able to answer them today, but if not I would be very willing to meet him to discuss them further. Will he commit to supporting formal recognition that drug safety testing is a matter for local police forces, and that the current system of local memorandums of understanding between the police, the testing organisation, the event management and other stakeholders is an appropriate and adequate mechanism for service delivery? Will he issue guidance to that effect? Secondly, will he consider exploring how this model could be more widely extended, particularly to nightclubs at weekends, as my hon. Friends have mentioned, but perhaps elsewhere as well? I know that the legislation may require clarification. It is not my intention today to be prescriptive on how that might be done, but my understanding is that existing legislation is sufficient but that there needs to be clarity.

Drugs, legal or otherwise, cost lives and information helps to save lives. Why would we not provide life-saving information? I say it is time to test.
drugs that have been seized or surrendered by agencies are tested for their make-up and safety—is an established and valued tool for information about local drug markets and the risks inherent in events. So-called “front of house” testing, as pioneered by the Loop and advocated for by the hon. Lady and others, has been deployed with police co-operation first of all at Boomtown in Hampshire four years ago, at Kendal Calling in Cumbria, and at Love Saves the Day in Bristol with the full agreement of chief constable Andy Marsh, so it is possible.

However, as we feel our way forward on this, driven by our desire to do more to protect our young people from the risk in the real world, where they will have access to drugs and many will be tempted to experiment—this is the real world we operate in—we clearly do not want to be doing anything, as I am sure the hon. Lady agrees, that can be seen as endorsing the possession and consumption of illegal drugs. I do not think that is what she, The Loop or anyone else wants, and the Home Office will certainly not be signing up to anything that risks endorsing illegal drug use. In fact, the Loop is very clear that that is not what it is about.

We must also make it clear that the results of a test on a sample should never be interpreted as meaning that a drug is safe, because there are many other variables, as the hon. Lady knows, such as how the drug is used, what it is mixed with and the physical make-up of the individual taking it. We have to be honest about that.

I am sure that we all agree on the need for more evidence about the real impact when it comes to the individual taking it. We have to be honest about that.

We also need better evidence about the causal link between this kind of testing and harm reduction, based on the experience of the UK and other countries where this tool has been introduced.

Having said that, I can confirm to the hon. Lady that the Home Office’s position, and that of Ministers, is that these are local operating decisions that we are not standing in the way of. The fact that chief constables from Cumbria, Avon and Somerset and Hampshire have stepped forward and said that they do want to co-operate sends a strong signal. I spoke earlier today to Chief Constable Andy Marsh from Avon and Somerset police, who is very clear that it is the right thing to do. He is also very comfortable about his legal position in doing so. Those are important signals.

Sandy Martin: Would the Minister be willing to make that position clear at the Association of Chief Police Officers conference?

Mr Hurd: I am coming to that, because the next thing I was going to say is that the relevant National Police Chiefs Council leads, Commander Simon Bray of the Metropolitan police and Deputy Chief Constable BJ Harrington of Essex police, have written to all chief constables and commissioners—I have the letter here—setting out the issues that they have to consider when assessing the value, benefits and risk of multi-agency drug testing at festivals. They make it clear that, as no drugs are returned to the user, there is no inadvertent supply offence. However, there are lots of issues that a police chief needs to think through in order to be comfortable. It is a local operating decision and we are not standing in the way, as is proven by the number of festivals deploying it.

However, in the light of the suggestion from the hon. Lady and others that there might be room for greater clarity in the guidance issued to the police on the matter, I have spoken to the Minister who leads on drugs policy, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Louth and Horncastle (Victoria Atkins), and she and I have agreed to speak to the police and explore whether the guidance could be further clarified. We have not received a direct request for greater clarity but, out of respect for the hon. Lady, and given the importance of the debate, I am happy to give that undertaking.

In the meantime, leaving aside the specific need to mitigate such risk at festivals, the Government have a very ambitions strategy for protecting people from dangerous drugs, and specifically for reducing the demand for drugs among young people by acting early to stop them taking them in the first place. A range of local initiatives are in place to improve safety and reduce drug-related harm, including social media messaging and communications from regional Public Health England centres. In addition, Public Health England continues to run “Frank”, the national drugs website and helpline for young people, which offers extensive information about drug risks and how to avoid them. “Frank” news articles in the festival season cover the risks in further detail.

The hon. Lady talked about psychoactive substances. We have already taken action to tackle the supply of so-called legal highs. Since the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 came into force, more than 300 retailers across the United Kingdom have closed down or are no longer selling those substances; police have arrested suppliers; and action by the National Crime Agency has resulted in the removal of psychoactive substances being sold by UK-based websites.

Everyone is concerned about the dangers posed by the availability of drugs on social media. We want the UK to be the safest place in the world in which to go online, and anything that is illegal offline should be illegal online. We encourage people to report worrying material to the police, as well as using the in-app tools to report such images to the app providers themselves. Law enforcement agencies continue to work with internet providers to shut down UK-based websites that are found to be committing offences.

As for education and raising awareness among young people, we are expanding the Alcohol and Drugs Education and Prevention Information Service, which provides practical advice based on the best international evidence, including briefing sheets for teachers. Rise Above, which is available on the internet and is aimed at 11 to 16-year-olds, provides material to help them to make positive choices for their health.

A huge amount is going on. We have an ambitious strategy to meet the challenges and work towards a safer, healthier Britain free from the harms of drugs. In the specific context of this debate, I hope that the hon. Lady will leave satisfied that the Government have listened, and that we will discuss the matter further with the police to establish whether clear guidance is needed.

Question put and agreed to.

3.6 pm

House adjourned.
Sir Henry Bellingham: If he will bring forward legislative proposals for a statute of limitations to protect British armed forces veterans from prosecution for historic allegations.

Gavin Williamson: The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): Before I answer my hon. Friend’s question, I understand that he is concluding his question. If he will permit me, I can only repeat that this is an issue that is best considered by the dedicated team. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. The Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. The Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. The Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. Will the Select Committee confirm that the Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. Will the Select Committee confirm that the Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team.

The Select Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): The Defence Committee will warmly welcome the setting up of the dedicated team. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 means that soldiers and terrorists alike cannot be sentenced to more than two years in jail, of which they will probably serve only half, and that in those circumstances, it is right that we should move to a statute of limitations so that we do not have an unfair imbalance where some are prosecuted and others are not?

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. Our armed forces have the very highest standards, and our ability to pursue people right around the world who have done some very bad things is absolutely the right stance to have. That is what we will continue to do.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): After the Good Friday agreement, a political decision was made to give letters of comfort to terrorists. Can we not make a political decision to give letters of comfort to our soldiers?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend is correct in his analysis of the current situation. We are keen to find a long-term solution to help all service personnel, from conflicts not only in Northern Ireland but in Afghanistan and Iraq, to ensure that vexatious claims are eliminated.

Daesh: Syria and Iraq

Rehman Chishti: Apart from military action, what steps are being taken to help to tackle the sectarian tension in Syria and Iraq, and in the wider region, which in part led to the rise of Daesh?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend highlights an important element. This is not just about support through the military; it is also about international development support and about building civil law enforcement,
which involves the police and, equally importantly, the courts, in order to give people confidence that the courts are fair and just.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Daesh still has a strong online presence. What is being done to combat that?

Gavin Williamson: As has been mentioned in the House, the British Government and the Ministry of Defence have been using offensive cyber in Iraq for the first time to counter the messages that Daesh puts out. We will continue to do that.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): As we train up personnel in Iraq, can I assume that the Secretary of State will ensure that the knowledge gained and the contacts made will be banked for the future for our own defence purposes, not least intelligence?

Gavin Williamson: Yes, the hon. Gentleman can have that assurance.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Fleet Support Ships

3. Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): What recent progress he has made on procuring fleet support ships for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; and if he will make a statement.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): Since entering a four-year assessment phase in April 2016, the project has held three industry days. We have also undertaken a period of market engagement with UK and international shipbuilders. We formally launched the international competition on 5 June. Subject to normal approvals, our current intent is to award the contract in 2020.

Chris Stephens: Will the Minister finally give us a reason why the ships are being put out to international competition? Would it not be better if UK shipyards were block building the ships?

Guto Bebb: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman’s question. I have explained several times at the Dispatch Box that we have adopted the shipbuilding strategy in full. The strategy is clear about defining warships as a capability that will be built in the UK and non-warships as a capability that will be subject to international competition.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will the Minister confirm that any weaponry installed on the fleet support ships will be procured from British companies?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The weapons element of any ship that is not designated as a warship will be procured from the United Kingdom and fixed on to the platforms in the United Kingdom.1

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Given that every other European country that has shipyards and procures such vessels builds them in their own shipyards, why will the Minister not accept that the problem is not with Brussels or with European regulations but with Whitehall and its refusal to back British industry, British workers and British steel?

Guto Bebb: I reject the right hon. Gentleman’s comments. This Department and this Government have supported our shipbuilding industry to such an extent that for the first time in 40 years we have actually secured significant orders for the export of British-designed warships to Australia. The right hon. Gentleman should recognise that the shipbuilding strategy is working by ensuring that our yards are competitive internationally. Protectionism is never a friend to a long-standing, secure industry.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I agree with the Minister that the superb recent news of the deal with Australia shows that we can compete internationally in this area. Does he agree that it is still important that local yards get the chance to bid and show that we are still at the cutting edge in this area?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Our shipbuilding industry, our businesses and our yards are fully engaged with the process, and they are confident that they can bring forward a successful bid. The key thing is that they will be bringing bids forward knowing that they are competitive on the world stage, not just being protected due to a “Britain First” policy.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I have just attended a good briefing by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), whose report is called “Growing the contribution of defence to UK prosperity”. On shipbuilding, will the Minister take the report’s recommendations seriously to help retain jobs in Rosyth in my constituency? My constituents need to know that prosperity means prosperity and that the contracts are coming home.

Guto Bebb: First, I extend my thanks to the workers of the Rosyth yard for their fantastic work on our carriers. Secondly, the report that has been produced about the contribution of defence to the prosperity of the UK is important, but I return to the point I made earlier: we have adopted all the recommendations of the shipbuilding strategy, and we are already seeing the results.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): We on the Opposition Benches join the Secretary of State in offering our deep condolences to the family of Dawn Sturgess and express our full support for the police as they investigate this appalling incident.

This morning, the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) published an important review titled “Growing the contribution of defence to UK prosperity”. The review was commissioned by the Secretary of State for Defence. It cites the new Type 31e frigate as an example of how the MOD has started to take the prosperity of the British economy into account in procurement. If that can be done with the new frigates, why on earth can it not be done for the fleet solid support ships?

Guto Bebb: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question but, once again, I refer him back to the shipbuilding strategy, which was endorsed on a cross-party basis. The key thing is that the Type 31e is a frigate and, as such, is designated as a warship. The fleet solid support ships are not designated as warships. We are very clearly following through the shipbuilding strategy, which we

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think will clearly improve the productivity of our yards and contribute to UK prosperity. The hon. Gentleman should do likewise.

**NATO Summit**

4. **Leo Docherty** (Aldershot) (Con): What has his priorities for the NATO summit in Brussels on 11 and 12 July 2018?

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** Our objective for the summit is a modern, unified NATO that is fit to face current and future global challenges and that is delivering against the commitments that allies have made.

**Leo Docherty:** Given that the NATO defence budget will be under discussion, does the Secretary of State agree that President Trump has a point when he criticises the lack of commitment on behalf of some member states towards our collective security?

**Gavin Williamson:** I think it is right to expect every single European country to contribute to the defence of Europe. All European countries need to step up their defence spending.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that American Presidents come and go but the alliance we have through NATO is the foundation stone of our security and our international effectiveness? Will he work to overcome resistance and to keep NATO strong, with America in it?

**Gavin Williamson:** We are rapidly approaching the 70th year of NATO, and this alliance has kept Europe at peace with itself and has delivered our security. I will do everything, as will the Government and, I am sure, the Opposition, to ensure that that endures and will last another 70 years.

**Sir Nicholas Soames** (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is the 70th anniversary year of the most successful defence alliance the world has ever seen? Does he agree that, after President Trump has rightly been accorded the respect that is his due for his views on the enlargement of spending on NATO, the most pressing object of the meeting should be the continuation of transformation? Without transformation, NATO cannot give a full account of itself on the battlefield.

**Gavin Williamson:** My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct in his analysis. We have to make sure that NATO has the ability to respond to the challenges of the future, which is why we are investing more in NATO’s command structure to make sure it can act more speedily against emerging threats.

**David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What message does the Secretary of State believe President Trump should take from the NATO summit to President Putin the following day?

**Gavin Williamson:** I was hoping President Trump would come to visit Britain before going to visit President Putin, but he should take a message of unity, of European nations and our north Atlantic partners standing shoulder to shoulder to make sure that Europe and the north Atlantic remain safe.

**James Gray** (North Wiltshire) (Con): I am delighted to hear the Secretary of State say that. Does he agree that it is totally and utterly unacceptable for a British citizen to be murdered by a foreign force on British soil, as happened in my neighbouring constituency of Salisbury? That will, of course, form a central part of discussions at NATO. Does he agree that it is surely right that we should show Russia a strong hand and say to it that this kind of behaviour is totally and utterly unacceptable?

**Gavin Williamson:** That is absolutely correct. We need to stand together with our allies, and we have had an unprecedented amount of support from countries right across the NATO alliance saying that the behaviour of Russia is completely and utterly unacceptable and is taking that country down the route of pariah status.

**Nia Griffith** (Llanelli) (Lab): The Secretary of State has repeatedly said that the conclusions of the modernising defence programme will be published in time for the NATO summit. I would never suggest that the Government are in the grip of complete chaos and, even if all those around him were to lose their head, I know the Defence Secretary, of all people, will keep his. Can he now assure the House that the promise to publish before Wednesday’s summit still stands?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we are aiming to do is introduce the headline findings of the modernising defence programme before the summer recess.

**Nia Griffith:** It is very troubling indeed that the UK risks going to this NATO summit without being able to offer certainty to allies about our future defence capabilities. The past few months have seen unprecedented leaks from the MDP, speculation about cuts, outlandish briefings to the media and even a reported threat to bring down the Prime Minister, although I gather the Defence Secretary may now have to join a queue for that. The MDP review will ultimately be a futile exercise, however, unless it is properly funded. Can he tell us what assurances he has had from the Chancellor that the Treasury will provide additional funds, as required?

**Gavin Williamson:** What we see is a Conservative Government who this year committed an extra £800 million over the budget that was going to go to the Ministry of Defence to support our armed forces. We are undertaking the modernising defence programme to look at the threats this nation faces and to make sure we have the best equipped and best trained armed forces to deal with those threats. The Government have committed money to our armed forces; we have a rising defence budget. We are a very proud nation in the sense that we can see we have been hitting 2% in the past and will continue to do so going forward.

**Former Service Personnel: Amputees**

5. **Dame Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): What support his Department provides to former service personnel who have had limbs amputated as a result of their military service.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** I am sure you will be familiar, Mr Speaker, with the significance of the battle of Solferino.
in 1859 when it comes to looking after our casualties. Tens of thousands of casualties were left for dead there and that is what Jeanne Marie DuNant, who went on to form the international Red Cross. Today, we do provide support for those who are injured on the battlefield, but even faster we move them into state-of-the-art hospitals, such as we saw in Helmand province. Some of them end up losing a limb or more, and we need to make sure that we look after these brave veterans for the rest of their lives.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): In 2011, Paul lost his left arm when injured by an improvised explosive device. He wrote about how he did not know how to go forward and did not want to leave the house, but he got everything back that the military offered him: confidence, camaraderie, teamwork and the chance to compete through an inspirational golfing charity, the On Course Foundation. Will the Minister agree to visit that charity and accept an invitation to see the American and British ex-servicemen compete for the Simpson cup, which is named after the founder John Simpson and will be played next year at the Royal & Ancient golf club between 19 and 22 May?

Mr Ellwood: I endorse absolutely the On Course Foundation and what it does. Such organisations and the Invictus games have shown us that there is a new chapter to be had and a new direction for those who have been injured in terms of what they can do through sport. Prince Harry is very involved in that. I would be more than delighted to accept my right hon. Friend’s invitation and I pay tribute to the work that has been done by John Simpson.

Stephen Morgan (Portsmouth South) (Lab): We know how important it is to link up the armed forces with the NHS, particularly for personnel who have suffered life-changing injuries. What steps has the Minister taken to strengthen those links?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Not only the Ministry of Defence, but other Departments have a responsibility in this regard. That is why we have set up the veterans board, but for those who have lost limbs or who have had severe injuries there is integrated personal commissioning for veterans. That makes sure that all the agencies that are required to support and individual through their life provide better access to help our brave veterans.

British Armed Forces: Knowledge and Experience

6. Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): What steps he is taking to ensure that knowledge and experience are retained in each rank of the British armed forces.

Mr Ellwood: I thank the Minister for that reply, but my question was really about the retention of skilled personnel. Like many right hon. and hon. Members, I was proud to attend the armed forces celebrations in my constituency, where I chatted to a number of former and current service personnel about the consequences of accelerated promotion within the armed forces. I am told that service personnel are being pushed through the ranks to cover gaps created by a retention crisis, which in turn is placing other pressures on recruitment. What is the average length of service today compared with what it was 10 years ago?

Mr Ellwood: First, let me join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Armed Forces Day, which is growing in status. It is important that we strengthen the bond between society and the armed forces, as it is from society that we recruit. The challenge we face is in recruiting people—we need to recruit 18, 19 and 20-year-olds who are fit and able then to meet the criteria.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): The quality of service housing and the cost of private sector housing around RAF Brize Norton in west Oxfordshire are major factors affecting retention. What are Ministers doing to address those two factors?

Mr Ellwood: I have visited Brize Norton—I was trying to weave that into the end of my answer to the hon. Member for Eastington (Grahame Morris)—and with the future accommodation model, we are trying to provide greater opportunity for those who want to live on the base, rent accommodation or, indeed, live outside and get on the housing ladder. I hope that that will lead to greater retention and recruitment.

Mr Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow) (Lab): I acknowledge Ministers’ work to retain knowledge and skill in the ranks of our defence forces; it is just a pity that they do not apply the same effort to our defence industry, instead of giving a billion-pound taxpayers’ order affecting retention. What consideration has my right hon. Friend given to those of other ranks train together on their core programme?

Mr Ellwood: As I said, the art of war is changing, and we need to diversify, which means recruiting a wider range of skillsets. Not everybody can come up through the ranks with all the capabilities that we need. We need to be cleverer at inviting people in at a higher rank, which is part of our enterprise approach to bringing in skillsets from civilian street at a much higher level.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): One factor that affects retention is esprit de corps. The Royal Marines have a unique training system whereby officers and those of other ranks train together on their core programme. What consideration has my right hon. Friend given to other branches of the armed forces doing that?

Mr Ellwood: I have visited Lympstone and the operation there is fantastic for recruiting some of the brightest, the best and the fittest. My hon. Friend puts a question for my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces, who I am sure would be delighted to have a cup of tea with him in the Tea Room.
rose—

Mr Speaker: In calling the hon. Gentleman, I welcome him back after a brief absence.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker.

An unfortunate aspect of the modernising defence programme debate is that we focus so much on kit and platforms and not enough on our real deterrent: the men and women of the armed forces. When the document eventually sees the light of day, will the Minister confirm at the Dispatch Box that it will allow the Ministry of Defence to lift the 1% pay cap?

Mr Ellwood: The lifting of the 1% pay cap has already advanced because the Chief Secretary to the Treasury liberated that ceiling last year when she made her statement. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence is pushing forward with the MDP. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that this is not just about equipment and training; it is about the people. It is the people who make our armed forces the most professional in the world.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: Thinking of the defence community in the round, which is of course the Minister’s brief, perhaps he can tell us why the Government are pressing ahead with the privatisation of the defence fire service. W e need to make sure that we provide the best safety for airfields, and I think that Capita will be able to provide that.

Leaving the EU: Defence and Military Aerospace Industry

7. Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has he made of the effect on the UK defence and military aerospace industry of the UK leaving the EU.

11. Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): What assessment has he made of the effect on the UK defence and military aerospace industry of the UK leaving the EU.

24. Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): What assessment has he made of the effect on the UK defence and military aerospace industry of the UK leaving the EU.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): The Ministry of Defence is working closely with the defence industry to understand the implications and opportunities presented by our departure from the EU. We will continue to work with our allies and partners on the development of the capability that we need to keep us safe, and much of this already takes place outside an EU framework. The UK defence industry is globally competitive and I am confident it will continue to thrive in the future.

Mr Bailey: The EU Galileo satellite navigation system is vital for Britain’s future defence capacity. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the finances required for an independent system in the event of a post-Brexit exclusion from this EU project?

Guto Bebb: I am glad to say to the hon. Gentleman that a cross-governmental group is looking into this issue to ensure that we are prepared for the possibility of having to build an independent system for the United Kingdom, but I repeat from the Dispatch Box what I have said previously: our preference is to remain involved in the Galileo project. To exclude the United Kingdom from the project would harm the project and do nothing to enhance the defence of Europe or the United Kingdom.

Thangam Debbonaire: People in Bristol working in the defence and aerospace industry and its supply chain are worried sick about their future if Airbus leaves because of Brexit. The industry supports thousands of jobs across the country, so why can the Government not reassure trade unions and the employers that there is a clear plan for this sector? What have they got against people in the aerospace and defence industry?

Guto Bebb: I do not think that this Government have anything against the aerospace industry. Indeed, the combat air strategy, which was announced by this Department recently, is a sign of our confidence in a world-beating aerospace sector. I will be very pleased when the completion of that work on our new combat air strategy is announced, as it will highlight what this country has to offer. I can assure the hon. Lady that other countries in Europe are very keen to work with us on that combat air strategy.

Martin Whitfield: Given the importance of future co-operation with the EU on a multitude of defence and security issues, will the Minister confirm when the Secretary of State intends to hold a bilateral meeting with Federica Mogherini, the EU High Representative?

Guto Bebb: I will write to the hon. Gentleman about the meeting between the Secretary of State and the individual from the Commission whom he named. I have to say that I have also been in Brussels recently with regard to this issue. It is clear from our perspective that we want to be involved with European defence firms. We would also like to be involved with the European Defence Agency, but the way in which this has been put together by the Commission makes that very difficult, because the third-country offer being made to the United Kingdom would not be beneficial to our position at this point, so there is still a lot of negotiation to be done. None the less, we are very, very clear that we would like to be involved in these projects.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the £20 billion Australian frigate order is yet another example of the confidence that there is in the UK defence industry as we leave the European Union?

Guto Bebb: It is, undoubtedly, a fantastic good news story for the United Kingdom. As I have said, it is the first time that we have exported a warship design in more than 40 years, and great credit should be offered...
to the teams at BAE and across Government who have worked so hard to ensure that that happens. It is a great success story for our industry and for the United Kingdom.

Fabian Hamilton (Leeds North East) (Lab): Major defence companies are clearly deeply concerned about the effect of this Government’s Brexit policy on their operations in the UK. Rolls-Royce has started to move some functions to Germany while the chief executive of Airbus has said that the Government have “no clue on how to execute Brexit without severe harm.”

Given that the man who was meant to be leading the UK’s approach to Brexit has now resigned because he has no confidence in his own Government’s approach, how on earth can business trust that this divided Government will deliver a Brexit deal that protects jobs and the economy?

Guto Bebb: The chief executive of Airbus made very similar comments back in January, but he would also be very pleased with the plans that were announced by the Prime Minister at the Chequers meeting. The key thing is that defence industries in the United Kingdom are confident—they have larger order books and they are winning contracts for the first time in generations in some countries. On top of that, I am also in regular discussions with defence companies in other parts of the world, which are very keen to invest in the United Kingdom.

Amphibious Capability

8. Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): What recent assessment has he made of the UK armed forces’ amphibious capability.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The Royal Navy and Royal Marines are integral to the UK’s global reputation in amphibious warfare. That is why the Government remain committed to ensuring the future of the amphibious warfare capability within our future force structures.

Daniel Kawczynski: I thank the Minister for that answer. Can he give me an assurance that Royal Marine numbers will not be cut in the foreseeable future and that there will be more joint exercises with our Polish and Baltic states allies?

Mark Lancaster: I am second to none in my admiration for the Royal Marines. Indeed, one of the highlights of my time as Armed Forces Minister has been presenting the green berets to them. I can absolutely assure my hon. Friend that there is a strong future for the Royal Marines as part of our armed forces. Of course, they are currently serving on HMS Albion off the Korean peninsula.

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister just mentioned HMS Albion. The sailors and the Royal Marines are serving with distinction in the far east, but their ship is under threat of being cut and they are watching decisions carefully. Can the Minister update us on when he expects to give them reassurance that their ship will not be cut, and can he give an assurance that the decision on Albion and Bulwark will be in the first tranche of decisions announced by his Department?

Mark Lancaster: Well, this seems to be a monthly exchange on the same subject, with the same question and, I fear, with same answer forthcoming: there are currently no plans to change the end-of-service dates for HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark, which are 2033 and 2034.

Tier 1 Status: Job Dependency

9. Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): What estimate he has made of the number of jobs that are dependent on the UK’s status as a tier 1 nation.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): The UK has always been and will always be a tier 1 military power, supported by a world-class defence industry. Last year, we spent £18.7 billion with UK industry and commerce, directly supporting 123,000 jobs throughout the United Kingdom. Through the modernising defence programme we are considering how to grow even further the already substantial contribution that defence makes to UK prosperity.

Stephen Metcalfe: Does the Minister agree that the excellent news of the BAE Systems contract to sell Type 26 frigates to Australia has come about in part because our Royal Navy has decided to buy them, and the rest of the world knows that, as a tier 1 military nation, we buy the best and most advanced equipment?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Quite clearly the capability of the Type 26 was understood and appreciated by our Australian counterparts, but the key element was the fact that the Royal Navy is committed to this platform as our future anti-submarine warfare frigate. There is no doubt that my hon. Friend is absolutely right that when the Royal Navy shows confidence in a piece of equipment, the rest of the world takes note.

21. Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Now that the Foreign Secretary has resigned and the Prime Minister seems confused about what our tier 1 status is, what are we doing to ensure that we retain tier 1 military status?

Guto Bebb: Well, I thank the hon. Lady for her question. It is important to understand that tier 1 is shorthand for the fact that we are a country that can reach globally in terms of our military capabilities. That has always been the case for the United Kingdom, and it shall remain the case for the United Kingdom under this Government.

Mental Health Support

10. Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to improve mental health support for members of the armed forces and veterans.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): One third of us will suffer some form of mental health problem during our lifetime, and the same applies to those in the armed forces. It is very important that we challenge the stigma that surrounds
mental health and ensure that we equate mental health with physical health. I am therefore pleased that we are moving forward with our mental health and wellbeing strategy, which encourages our service personnel to step up so that we can treat at an early stage.

**Chris Davies:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend values the work carried out by the charity sector in this field, with organisations such as Combat Stress, Change Step and Care after Combat conducting vital work in support of military veterans. Will the Government therefore consider funding these charities, or giving them further funding, so that they are able to do more?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend gives me licence to thank all the service-facing charities for their work—there are more than 400 of them. I have had the honour of visiting Veterans’ Gateway, which is a simple online portal that brings together organisations, giving those who seek help one place to go to for support. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that we need to ensure that these charities are funded. The MOD does not directly fund them, but we do fund individual projects. I would be more than delighted to meet him to discuss the matter further.

**Bill Grant:** I am sure that the Minister will agree that it is vital that the UK Government and devolved Administrations work together on this important issue of mental health. Will he assure me that he is working closely with the Scottish and Welsh Governments to ensure that all veterans and service personnel have access to the high-quality mental health support that they so richly deserve, irrespective of where in the United Kingdom they reside?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Wherever veterans are in the United Kingdom, we must ensure that every one receives the support that they deserve. That is why the Veterans Board brings together the devolved Administrations, and the MOD health partnership board brings together the health specialists from all the devolved nations and England.

**Defence Exports**

12. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage defence exports by UK companies. [906324]

20. **Maggie Throup** (Erewash) (Con): What steps he is taking to encourage defence exports by UK companies. [906332]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** The Ministry of Defence continues to lead strategic exports campaigns, working across Government and with industry to win business abroad. I am sure that hon. Members will join me in welcoming BAE Systems’ success in being selected as the preferred bidder in Australia’s SEA 5000 future frigate programme.

**John Howell:** What plans does the Secretary of State have for the next phase of exports for the Type 26 frigates?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have a world-leading product and want to sell it right across the world. The deal with Australia is a great success; it is the first major export of ships in more than 40 years. The next place that we will target is, of course, Canada. Working closely with our “Five Eyes” partners, it is important that we have capability so that we can work together, as well as build prosperity together.

**Maggie Throup:** While we hear much about the physical exports manufactured by Chemring Defence in my constituency, among other companies, what more is being done to export British military skills and training, which are the envy of the world, so that we ensure that operational equipment that is exported from the UK is used in accordance with our specific aims?

**Gavin Williamson:** In answer to the last bit of that question, I am very confident that the answer is no. I had regular discussions with the former Foreign Secretary about exports, and I will continue to work very closely with the Foreign Office. I pay tribute to the way in which the Department for International Trade and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, especially the high commission in Canberra, have worked with the Ministry of Defence to land this vital order.

**Mr Jim Cunningham** (Coventry South) (Lab): What discussions has the Secretary of State had with Rolls-Royce regarding the shedding of power generation to other companies, because there could be jobs at stake?

**Gavin Williamson:** We have constant discussions with not just Rolls-Royce but many other companies because of the importance of our whole industrial partnership. We will continue to do so.

**Tom Tugendhat** (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the Premier of South Australia, who will be in the House in about four minutes and whom I will be taking to tea in the Pugin Room? I would be very grateful if my right hon. Friend would like to join us to congratulate him on buying the Type 26 and encourage his Canadian opposite numbers to do likewise. Does he agree that this offers an opportunity to build a Commonwealth of common law on our sea lanes and keep trade open for all of us?

**Gavin Williamson:** We will work ever more closely with our Commonwealth cousins in order to do that. The Royal Australian Navy’s making this investment is an absolutely vital step forward for our relationship with it. This is about more than just buying ships; it is also about the capability to operate together and keep world sea lanes safe.
14. **Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): What plans he has for the Army reserve centre in Prestatyn. [906326]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): The future of the Prestatyn is yet to be finalised. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers regiment is doing a reorganisation of its assets. This is part of the rationalisation of real estate. However, there are no further announcements to be made at the moment.

**Chris Ruane**: There has been an armed forces footprint in the Vale of Clwyd for over 100 years. I am opposed to 119 Recovery Company leaving Prestatyn and the disposal of that site. Will the Minister and his Department consult local stakeholders, including the town council, the county council and, especially, the Royal British Legion, before they make their decision?

**Mr Ellwood**: Well, HQ 160th Infantry Brigade and 38 (Irish) Brigade will continue to have a footprint in the area. I would be more than delighted to meet the hon. Gentleman to discuss this. I am always happy to consult local stakeholders, including the town council, the county council and, especially, the Royal British Legion, before they make their decision.

**UN Peacekeeping Missions**

15. **Afzal Khan** (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): What steps his Department is taking to increase the UK’s contribution to UN peacekeeping missions. [906327]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): The MOD has more than doubled the number of British forces on UN peacekeeping missions in the past three years in accordance with the commitment made in the strategic defence and security review in 2015. This is through new deployments to the UN missions in South Sudan and Somalia, in addition to our long-standing commitment to the UN mission in Cyprus. That means that we have increased numbers from some 300 to over 670 today.

**Afzal Khan**: It is important that NATO works hand in hand with the UN and other bodies with regard to conflict prevention and peacekeeping. What steps are the Government taking to promote collaboration between NATO and the UN to make that as efficient as possible?

**Mark Lancaster**: I met the UN Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Pierre Lacroix, in London last month, and that is just the sort of discussion we have with him. There are a number of areas where we think that closer co-operation between the UN and NATO can be of benefit, and that is precisely why we are increasing our commitment to the UN in practical terms.

**Armed Forces: Scottish Taxation**

16. **Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): What discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on supporting members of the armed forces posted to Scottish roles by mitigating the costs of additional taxation applied by the Scottish Government. [906328]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I have regular discussions with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on armed forces funding. Work to identify which Scottish taxpayer service personnel should benefit from any financial mitigation offered, how much that should be and how best it can be delivered through the payroll is almost complete. I hope to be able to update the House shortly, following final Government consultation, which is under way. I will update service personnel by the end of this month, after having informed the House.

**Douglas Ross**: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for the progress he has made so far, following campaigning by myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Angus (Kirstene Hair) and the Scottish Conservative group, but can he outline when military personnel in Moray and across Scotland can expect those details? These men and women proudly serve the United Kingdom but are punished in the pocket by the SNP, which has made Scotland the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom.

**Gavin Williamson**: May I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend and his Conservative and Unionist colleagues from Scotland? If they had not been campaigning on this issue, a solution would not be being provided, because SNP Members were silent on it. We are going to deliver. Hopefully, if everything is agreed in terms of a write around and laying a written ministerial statement next week, we can inform service personnel about how we will help to protect them from the Nat tax before the end of this month.

**Cyber-attacks**

17. **Stephen McPartland** (Stevenage) (Con): What plans he has to strengthen the resilience of the UK’s critical infrastructure against cyber-attacks. [906329]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster): Defence takes cyber-threats very seriously, and we regularly assess our ability to defend against them. We are strengthening our defences against increasingly sophisticated attacks through a wide range of technical, operational and administrative measures, including close co-operation with the National Cyber Security Centre.

**Stephen McPartland**: Can the Minister provide an update on whether the recruitment plan for reservists with cyber-specialisms is working?

**Mark Lancaster**: I am delighted to say that it is. My hon. Friend hits on a key issue. We have recognised that many of the skillsets we need sit in the private sector, which is why we have actively recruited reservists into this area, and I am delighted to say that the joint cyber reserve unit is now at 90% strength.

**Graham P. Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): Two weeks ago, a large Hyndburn company had 4,000 cyber-attacks from Russia in one day. What are the Government doing to protect UK companies?

**Mark Lancaster**: I can only update the hon. Gentleman about the opening of the National Cyber Security Centre just a mile down the road. That is precisely why the Government have invested some £1.9 billion in cyber over the past few years.
JAMES CLEVERLY (Braintree) (Con): Welcome my right hon. Friend’s commitment to use the reserve forces as a way to get cyber-experts into the field, metaphorically. Will he ensure that they have a career path through the reserve forces that does not cap them because of their niche specialisations?

MARK LANCASTER: My hon. Friend raises an important point. That is precisely why I was honoured to open the new Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham in March. We recognise that basic cyber-skills will be vital in our armed forces. This will become a separate career branch in time, but we hope that every member of the armed forces will have cyber-skills.

Shipbuilding Contracts: Scottish Yards

18. DEIDRE BROCK (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): What steps the Government are taking to secure shipbuilding contracts from other countries for Scottish yards.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): The national shipbuilding strategy seeks the long-term growth of UK shipbuilding, including Scottish yards. The Ministry of Defence works closely with industry and the Department for International Trade on export campaigns for platforms, sub-systems and support. We seek to build on our recent success in the Australian SEA 5000 competition—for example, through our Type 31e frigate programme, which considers exports from the outset.

GUTO BEBB: Part of BAE Systems’s bid to win the order to build ships for the Australian navy was the promise that workers on the Clyde would have already ironed out any problems with the ships because they were being built for the Royal Navy first. Is it not the case that the expertise and craft of Clyde ship workers allow BAE to make huge profits by building those ships in Adelaide, but there will be no benefit for the Scottish yards at all? Is it not the case that Scotland’s shipbuilders have been sold down the river?

Deidre Brock: Part of BAE Systems’s bid to win the order to build ships for the Australian navy was the promise that workers on the Clyde would have already ironed out any problems with the ships because they were being built for the Royal Navy first. Is it not the case that the expertise and craft of Clyde ship workers allow BAE to make huge profits by building those ships in Adelaide, but there will be no benefit for the Scottish yards at all? Is it not the case that Scotland’s shipbuilders have been sold down the river?

Guto Bebb: With supporters such as the hon. Lady, I shudder about the future of the Scottish shipbuilding sector. The yards on the Clyde will benefit immensely from this vote of confidence in their design capability. The supply chain will benefit immensely from opportunities that come from this contract, and other export opportunities are available for both the Type 26 and Type 31, which will be built in the United Kingdom. She speaks ill of her own constituency in Scotland with such a negative attitude.

Threat Environment

19. MICHELLE DONELAN (Chippenham) (Con): What recent discussions he has had with the National Security Adviser on the existing and changing intensity of the threat environment.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): As the House is aware, my Department is currently conducting the modernising defence programme. I meet the National Security Adviser on a regular basis to discuss key issues, including Russia’s increasingly destabilising behaviour; conflict and tension in Syria and the wider middle east; the spread of violent extremism and organised crime in ungoverned spaces; and of course the situation on the Korean peninsula.

Michelle Donelan: Will my right hon. Friend update the House about the threat to British citizens from the Russian state following the tragic announcement of the death of Dawn Sturgess in Wiltshire?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work incredibly closely with the police on the investigation, as well as on the clear-up effort; 175 armed forces personnel are currently working with them. The simple reality is that Russia has committed an attack on British soil that has seen the death of a British citizen, and that is something I think the world will unite with us in condemning.

Mr Speaker: I am just seeking to recover from seeing the sartorial magnificence of the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson)—quite remarkable.

UK Prosperity

23. MR PHILIP DUNNE (Ludlow) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to promote UK prosperity.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): In line with the Government’s industrial strategy, the Department is committed to supporting UK prosperity through the contribution it makes to our stability and security, and through growing the economic value generated by defence activities. My hon. Friend has today published an independent report, with recommendations to enhance the contribution defence makes to UK prosperity. I would like to thank him for his work, which we will be considering very closely.

Mr Dunne: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for the opportunity to produce this report. I have to say that I was surprised but encouraged to see Opposition Front Benchers attending the launch earlier today, and given their contributions in the Chamber, they are clearly learning something from it. Does my right hon. Friend agree with my recommendation that we should take advantage, as we come out of the EU, and look at how the MOD can take account of the UK economic impact in its major procurements?

Gavin Williamson: Leaving the European Union presents this country with one of its greatest opportunities in a generation, and we must use every opportunity we have to leverage prosperity for the United Kingdom. Let us not forget that for every single pound spent on defence, £4 is generated in our economy, so investing in defence is investing in Britain’s prosperity.

Topical Questions

T2. [906338] GRAHAM P. JONES (Hyndburn) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I would like to pay tribute to all service personnel who took part in Armed Forces Day last week and to the members of the public who went out to support them. The fantastic events up and down the country showcased the very best of our armed forces, and I was delighted to
be able to attend the main event at Llandudno. I also want to thank the personnel recently involved in fighting the fires on Saddleworth moor.

**Graham P. Jones:** I welcome the intervention, as I know the Secretary of State does, of the British Army in tackling the illegal wildlife trade in places such as Kenya, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Ethiopia. This is a global problem, so what answers—multinational answers—do this Government have for the global problem of the illegal wildlife trade and the protection of our planet?

**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Gentleman outlines a number of examples of where we are doing so much. Personally, I have become slightly cautious of dealing with elephants since my recent involvement with them. We have to do more and more to provide protection and counter the illegal wildlife trade. So much of the money from the illegal wildlife trade goes to fund terrorism and organised crime, and that is why the armed forces are working more closely with organisations involved in counteracting poaching.

**T3.** 

**James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con):** I very much welcome the Secretary of State’s recent re-confirmation that we are and will remain a tier 1 defence nation—that is very good news, although one or two other people did not recognise that description—but if that is to be the case, will he reconfirm how much more money we need every year even to stand still?

**Gavin Williamson:** Britain has always been and always will be a tier 1 nation. SDSR ’15 set out clearly what we would expect from a tier 1 nation. We are very much welcome the Secretary of State’s recent re—

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** Capita’s recruiting partnership project is failing on every measure. It has missed the MOD target for savings by more than £100 million in the past six years and the latest figures show that the number of personnel in the Army has fallen yet again. Does the Minister agree with Labour that it is time to take this failing contract back in-house?

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):** No, I absolutely do not. The hon. Lady’s comments are slightly short-sighted. There have been challenges for the defence recruiting system in recent months, but I am confident that, because of some of the hypercare measures, we are firmly on the up.

**Nia Griffith:** After Capita’s abysmal failure to deliver the recruitment project, many people would question its capacity to carry out any major MOD contracts, but the Government’s decision to outsource the Defence Fire and Rescue Service to Capita when the MOD has scored the company as 10 out of 10 for risk simply beggars belief. The Minister’s response to the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) suggested that the Government are ideologically obsessed with privatising key services without considering the consequences. Is it not surely time for an urgent rethink of this dangerously short-sighted policy?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood):** It took far too long for the contract to be awarded—I made that very clear during a statement a couple of weeks ago. However, I stand by what I said: it is important that we look after our airfields and get a good deal, which will be provided by Capita.

**T6.** 

**Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con):** Horsham was among many UK towns to celebrate Armed Forces Day. Has my right hon. Friend considered celebrations on other days to prolong activities and coverage—for example, a day to celebrate our reserve forces?

**Mark Lancaster:** Indeed, as a serving reservist for some 30 years, I hope there is no greater champion of reserves in the House, but my hon. Friend makes an important point. We should celebrate reserves not just on Reserves Day, but almost every day of the year. To that end, we are looking carefully at other opportunities.

**T4.** 

**Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD):** Much equipment is bought in dollars and the value of the pound has fallen since the EU referendum. How much less equipment have the Government been able to buy in dollars, and how will the shortfall be filled?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb):** The right hon. Gentleman should be aware that, like every other Department, the MOD hedges to ensure that we are not affected by currency fluctuations. Indeed, changes since the start of the year have been beneficial. At this point in time, the effect will be minimal.

**T7.** 

**Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab):** Cyber-security is more important than ever and should be—

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) is going to have to get used to her popularity. She should wear it lightly upon her shoulders.

**Lyn Brown:** That is so true, Mr Speaker. Thank you. Cyber-security is more important than ever and should be paramount for those who are in charge of our armed forces. Will the Secretary of State tell me whether it is true that when he threatened to bring down the Prime Minister, Siri replied: “I’m sorry. I don’t understand.”?

**Mark Lancaster:** I am sorry that the hon. Lady belittles cyber with such a cheap remark. If she were serious about the security of this country, she would recognise that the Government have invested more than £1.9 billion in cyber in recent years. We recently opened the Defence Cyber School to ensure that it is ingrained in the training of our armed forces.

**T9.** 

**Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con):** Members of the all-party parliamentary group on Poland, including me, last week met British soldiers serving in the Suwalki gap, helping to defend Poland. What are the key aspects of our bilateral treaty agreement with Poland going forward?
Gavin Williamson: We will show the whole House the full treaty we concluded with Poland. One key element was not just military co-operation but how we can work closer together on an industrial basis. Recently, I was in Poland meeting my opposite number to discuss how we can develop new technologies together for the defence not just of Poland but all our NATO allies.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I recently recorded a welcome home message for members of the Royal Welsh battlegroup, who have been serving bravely on the frontline in Estonia, supporting the NATO alliance. This morning, President Trump yet again criticised our European NATO allies, saying that NATO does not do enough for America. When will the Defence Secretary and the Prime Minister explain to the President that security and co-operation across Europe are in America’s interests as well as Europe’s?

Gavin Williamson: Unity and the strong alliance between all NATO allies is absolutely critical. I join the hon. Member in paying tribute to the Royal Welsh, who have done such an amazing job in Estonia. We will continue to show that unity with our allies—the United States, Estonia and all NATO allies—not just this year but over the next 70 years.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the Veterans’ Gateway, which is led by the Royal British Legion, is a huge boost to our amazing veterans?

Mr Ellwood: It was my honour to visit the Veterans’ Gateway last week. This is an incredible portal that allows the 400 or so service-facing charities to provide access for those who need help. I very much hope that this will advance and that more charities will join in and support it.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that existing black hole in the defence equipment budget cannot be filled by the small annual increase in that budget?

Gavin Williamson: This is why we are undertaking the modernising defence programme: to see how best we can change and respond to meet all the commitments this country has always met to keep Britain and our allies safe. That is what we will be doing to assess the threats Britain faces.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations want to dispose of Duncombe barracks in York. Will the Ministry of Defence ensure that they work with City of York Council and use the principles of One Public Estate, so that the land is developed in the housing interests of the city, rather than that of developers?

Mr Ellwood: The cadet programme is one of the huge success stories in Britain, with over 400 cadet units operating throughout the country. I join with the hon. Lady in paying tribute to what they do to advance an interest in the armed forces and the education of our young.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for his personal support for the Year of Engineering and for all his Department is doing to create inspirational and exciting experiences that demonstrate what it is to be an engineer in the military. Will he pass on my thanks to all those involved in making that happen?

Gavin Williamson: I most certainly will. We celebrate 100 years of the Royal Air Force, which plays a key part in driving technological development and inspiring so many young people to enter a career in engineering. Seeing amazing aeroplanes designed and flown is an inspiration for many future generations.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): In this centenary year of the RAF, will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State join me in celebrating its extraordinary achievements and encourage as many people as possible to see the exhibition at Horse Guards and the fly-past tomorrow?

Gavin Williamson: Yes, I will.
Leaving the EU

3.33 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure the House will join me in sending our deepest condolences to the family and friends of Dawn Sturgess, who passed away last night. The police and security services are working urgently to establish the full facts, in what is now a murder investigation. I want to pay tribute to the dedication of staff at Salisbury District Hospital for their tireless work in responding to this appalling crime. Our thoughts are also with the people of Salisbury and Amesbury. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will make a statement shortly, including on the support we will continue to provide to the local community throughout this difficult time.

Turning to Brexit, I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Members for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) for their work over the last two years. (Interruption.) We do not agree about the best way of delivering our shared commitment to honour the result of the referendum, but I want to recognise the former Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union for the work he did to establish a new Department and steer through Parliament some of the most important legislation for generations, and similarly to recognise the passion that the former Foreign Secretary demonstrated in promoting.—(Interruption.)

Mr Speaker: Order. There is a very unseemly atmosphere. I want to hear about these important matters, and I think the House should.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I recognise the passion that the former Foreign Secretary demonstrated in promoting a global Britain to the world as we leave the European Union. I am also pleased to welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) as the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

On Friday at Chequers, the Cabinet agreed a comprehensive and ambitious proposal that provides a responsible and credible basis for progressing negotiations with the EU towards a new relationship after we leave on 29 March next year. It is a proposal that will take back control of our borders, our money and our laws, but do so in a way that protects jobs, allows us to strike new trade deals through an independent trade policy and keeps our people safe and our Union together.

Before I set out the details of this proposal, I want to start by explaining why we are putting it forward. The negotiations so far have settled virtually all of the withdrawal agreement, and we have agreed an implementation period that will provide businesses and Governments with the time to prepare for our future relationship with the EU. But on the nature of that future relationship, the two models that are on offer from the EU are simply not acceptable.

First, there is what is provided for in the European Council’s guidelines from March this year. This amounts to a standard free trade agreement for Great Britain, with Northern Ireland carved off in the EU’s customs union and parts of the single market, separated through a border in the Irish sea from the UK’s own internal market.

No Prime Minister of our United Kingdom could ever accept this; it would be a profound betrayal of our precious Union. And while I know some might propose instead a free trade agreement for the UK as a whole that is not on the table, because it would not allow us to meet our commitment under the Belfast agreement that there should be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Secondly, there is what some people say is on offer from the EU: a model that is effectively membership of the European economic area, but going further in some places, and the whole of the UK remaining in the customs union. This would mean continued free movement, continued payment of vast sums every year to the EU for market access, a continued obligation to follow the vast bulk of EU law, and no independent trade policy, with no ability to strike our own trade deals around the world. I firmly believe this would not honour the referendum result, so if the EU continues on that course, there is a serious risk it could lead to no deal. This would most likely be a disorderly no deal, for without an agreement on our future relationship, I cannot see that this Parliament would approve the withdrawal agreement with a Northern Ireland protocol and financial commitments, and without those commitments, the EU would not sign a withdrawal agreement.

A responsible Government must prepare for a range of potential outcomes, including the possibility of no deal, and given the short period remaining before the conclusion of negotiations, the Cabinet agreed on Friday that these preparations should be stepped up. But at the same time, we should recognise that such a disorderly no deal would have profound consequences for both the UK and the EU, and I believe that the UK deserves better.

The Cabinet agreed that we need to present the EU with a new model, evolving the position that I had set out in my Mansion House speech, so that we can accelerate negotiations over the summer, secure a new relationship in the autumn, pass the withdrawal and implementation Bill and leave the European Union on 29 March 2019.

The friction-free movement of goods is the only way to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, and it is the only way to protect the uniquely integrated supply chains and just-in-time processes on which millions of jobs and livelihoods depend. So at the heart of our proposal is a UK-EU free trade area that will avoid the need for customs and regulatory checks at the border and protect those supply chains. Achieving this requires four steps. The first is a commitment to maintaining a common rulebook for industrial goods and agricultural products. To deliver this, the UK would make an up-front sovereign choice to commit to ongoing harmonisation with EU rules on goods, covering only those necessary to provide for frictionless trade at the border. This would not cover services, because that is not necessary to ensure free flow at the border, and it would not include the common agricultural and fisheries policies, which the UK will leave when we leave the EU.

The regulations covered are relatively stable and supported by a large share of our manufacturing businesses. We would continue to play a strong role in shaping the European and international standards that underpin them, and there would be a parliamentary lock on all
new rules and regulations, because when we leave the EU we will end the direct effect of EU law in the UK. All laws in the UK will be passed in Westminster, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast. Our Parliament would have the sovereign ability to reject any proposals if it so chose, recognising that there would be consequences, including for market access, if we chose a different approach from the EU.

Secondly, we will ensure a fair trading environment. Under our proposal, the UK and the EU would incorporate strong reciprocal commitments relating to state aid. We would establish co-operative arrangements between regulators on competition and commit to maintaining high regulatory standards for the environment, climate change, social and employment, and consumer protection.

Thirdly, we would need a joint institutional framework to provide for the consistent interpretation and application of UK-EU agreements by both parties. This would be done in the UK by UK courts and in the EU by EU courts, with due regard paid to EU case law in areas where the UK continued to apply a common rulebook. This framework would also provide a robust and appropriate means for the resolution of disputes, including through the establishment of a joint committee of representatives from the UK and the EU. It would respect the autonomy of the UK’s and the EU’s legal orders and be based on the fundamental principle that the court of one party cannot resolve disputes between the two.

Fourthly, the Cabinet also agreed to put forward a new business-friendly customs model—a facilitated customs arrangement—that would remove the need for customs checks and controls between the UK and the EU because we would operate as if a combined customs territory. Crucially, it would also allow the UK to pursue an independent trade policy. The UK would apply the UK’s tariffs and trade policy for goods intended for the UK and the EU’s tariffs and trade policy for goods intended for the EU. Some 96% of businesses would be able to pay the correct tariff or no tariff at the UK border, so there would be no additional burdens for them compared with the status quo and they would be able to benefit from the new trade deals that we will strike. In addition, we will bring forward new technology to make our customs systems as smooth as possible for businesses that trade with the rest of the world.

Some have suggested that under this arrangement the UK would not be able to do trade deals. They are wrong. When we have left the EU, the UK will have its own independent trade policy, with its own seat at the World Trade Organisation and the ability to set tariffs for its trade with the rest of the world. We will be able to pursue trade agreements with key partners, and on Friday the Cabinet agreed that we would consider seeking accession to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for trans-Pacific partnership.

Our Brexit plan for Britain respects what we have heard from businesses about how they want to trade with the EU after we leave and will ensure we are best placed to capitalise on the industries of the future in line with our modern industrial strategy. Finally, as I have said before, our proposal includes a far-reaching security partnership that will ensure continued close co-operation with our allies across Europe while enabling us to operate an independent foreign and defence policy. So this is a plan that is not just good for British jobs but good for the safety and security of our people at home and in Europe too.

Some have asked whether this proposal is consistent with the commitments made in the Conservative manifesto. It is. The manifesto said: “As we leave the European Union, we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union but we will seek a deep and special partnership including a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement.”

What we are proposing is challenging for the European Union. It requires the EU to think again, to look beyond the positions that it has taken so far, and to agree a new and fair balance of rights and obligations. That is the only way in which to meet our commitments to avoid a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland without damaging the constitutional integrity of the UK and while respecting the result of the referendum. It is a balance that reflects the links that we have established over the last 40 years as some of the world’s largest economies and security partners. It is a bold proposal, which we will set out more fully in a White Paper on Thursday. We now expect the EU to engage seriously with the detail, and to intensify negotiations over the summer so that we can get the future relationship that I firmly believe is in all our interests.

In the two years since the referendum we have had a spirited national debate, with robust views echoing around the Cabinet table, as they have around breakfast tables up and down the country. Over that time I have listened to every possible idea and every possible version of Brexit. This is the right Brexit. It means leaving the European Union on 29 March 2019; a complete end to free movement, and taking back control of our borders; an end to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the UK, restoring the supremacy of British courts; no more sending vast sums of money each year to the EU, but instead a Brexit dividend to spend on domestic priorities such as our long-term plan for the NHS; flexibility on services, in which the UK is world-leading; no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, or between Northern Ireland and Great Britain; a parliamentary lock on all new rules and regulations; leaving the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy; the freedom to strike new trade deals around the world; an independent foreign and defence policy—but not the most distant relationship possible with our neighbours and friends; instead, a new deep and special partnership. It means frictionless trade in goods; shared commitments to high standards, so that together we continue to promote open and fair trade; and continued security co-operation to keep our people safe.

This is the Brexit that is in our national interest. It is the Brexit that will deliver on the democratic decision of the British people, and it is the right Brexit deal for Britain. I commend this statement to the House.

3.47 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for advance copy of her statement, and share her condolences to the friends and family of Dawn Sturgess.

We are more than two years on from the referendum: two years of soundbites, indecision and Cabinet infighting, culminating in a series of wasted opportunities, with more and more people losing faith that this Government
are capable of delivering a good Brexit deal—and that is just within the Prime Minister’s own Cabinet. It is two years since the referendum and 16 months since article 50 was triggered, and it was only this weekend that the members of the Cabinet managed to agree a negotiating position among themselves—and that illusion lasted 48 hours.

There are now only a few months left until the negotiations are supposed to conclude. We have a crisis in the Government; two Secretaries of State have resigned; and we are still no clearer about what our future relationship with our nearest neighbours and biggest trading partners will look like. Workers and businesses deserve better than this. It is clear that the Government are not capable of securing a deal to protect the economy, jobs and living standards. It is clear that the Government cannot secure a good deal for Britain.

On Friday the Prime Minister was so proud of her Brexit deal that she wrote to her MPs to declare that collective Cabinet responsibility “is now fully restored”, while the Environment Secretary added his own words, saying that “one of the things about this compromise is that it unites the Cabinet.”

The Chequers compromise took two years to reach and just two days to unravel. How can anyone have faith in the Prime Minister getting a good deal with 27 European Union Governments when she cannot even broker a deal within her own Cabinet?

To be fair—I want to be fair to the former Brexit Secretary and the former Foreign Secretary—I think they would have resigned on the spot on Friday, but they were faced with a very long walk, no phone and, due to Government cuts, no bus service either. So I think they were probably wise to hang on for a couple of days so they could get a lift home in a Government car.

I also want to congratulate the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab) on his appointment as the Secretary of State. He now becomes our chief negotiator on an issue that could not be more important or more urgent. But this new Secretary of State is on record as wanting to tear up people’s rights. He has said: “I don’t support the Human Rights Act...leaving the European Union would present enormous opportunities to ease the regulatory burden on employers.” And he is the one negotiating, apparently, on behalf of this Government in Europe.

This mess is all of the Prime Minister’s own making. For too long she has spent more time negotiating the divisions in her party than she has in putting any focus on the needs of our economy. The Prime Minister postured with red line after red line, and now, as reality bites, she is backsliding on every one of them. We were also given commitments that this Government would achieve “the exact same benefits” and “free and frictionless trade” with the EU. Now those red lines are fading, and the team the Prime Minister appointed to secure this deal for our country has jumped the sinking ship; far from “strong and stable”, there are Ministers overboard and the ship is listing, all at the worst possible time.

If we look at the Prime Minister’s proposals for the long delayed White Paper, we see that this is not the comprehensive plan for jobs in Britain and the economy that the people of this country deserve. These proposals stop well short of a comprehensive customs union, something trade unions and manufacturers have all been demanding; instead, they float a complex plan that had already been derided by her own Cabinet members as “bureaucratic” and “unwieldy”.

The agreement contains no plan to protect our service industry and no plan to prevent a hard border in Northern Ireland, and also puts forward the idea of “regulatory flexibility”, which we all know is code for deregulation of our economy. The Government’s proposals would lead to British workplace rights, consumer rights, food safety standards and environmental protections falling behind EU standards over time, and none of this has even been tested in negotiations.

The Chequers agreement now stands as a shattered truce, a sticking plaster over the cavernous cracks in this Government. The future of jobs and investment is now at stake, and those jobs and that investment are not a sub-plot in the Tory party’s civil war. At such a crucial time for our country in these vital negotiations, we need a Government who are capable of governing and negotiating for Britain. For the good of this country and its people, the Government need to get their act together and do it quickly, and if they cannot, make way for those who can.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman has been in this House for quite a long time, and I know that he will have heard many statements. The normal response to a statement is to ask some questions. I do not think that there were any questions anywhere in that; nevertheless I will—[Interpellation.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Members on both sides of the House should try to calm down. There is a long way to go and, as is my usual custom, I hope to be able to call everybody who wants to ask a question. People do not need to chunter from their seats when they can speak on their feet.

The Prime Minister: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I will comment on a few of the points that the right hon. Gentleman has made. He talks about removing or lowering standards in a number of areas, including employment. As I said in my statement, we will “commit to maintaining high regulatory standards for the environment, climate change and social and employment and consumer protection.”

He says that there is no plan in what I had said to ensure that there would be no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, but in fact the very opposite is the case. The plan delivers the commitment for no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. At the beginning of his response, he thanked me for giving him early sight of my statement. It is just a pity that he obviously did not bother to read it.

The right hon. Gentleman says that we are two years on. This is the right hon. Gentleman who, immediately after the referendum decision in 2016, said we should have triggered article 50 immediately with no preparation whatsoever. He talks about delivery. Well, I remind him that we delivered the joint report in December, we delivered the implementation plan in March, and now we stand ready to deliver on Brexit for the British people with the negotiations that we are about to enter
into. He talks about resignations, but I remind him that he has had, I think, 103 resignations from his Front Bench, so I will take no lectures from him on that.

When it comes to delivering a strong economy and jobs for the future, the one party that would never deliver a strong economy is the Labour party, whose economic policies would lead to a run on the pound, capital flight and the loss of jobs for working people up and down this country.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Whatever one’s view might be on the plan that my right hon. Friend has been talking about, I urge her not to accept a single recommendation from the Leader of the Opposition, as nobody else in his party does so. May I urge her, however, to answer this question. As she lays this plan in front of the European Union Commission and proceeds with the negotiations, does she believe that there will be any concessions offered to them, or none?

The Prime Minister: This is the plan that we believe is going to deliver on Brexit for the British people, in a way that gives us a smooth and orderly Brexit and ensures that we can do all the things we want to do in terms of trade policies around the rest of the world and the commitments that we have made to Northern Ireland. When the White Paper is published on Thursday, my right hon. Friend will see that there are a number of areas, such as participation in certain agencies, where we are proposing a way forward, and of course there will need to be negotiations on that way forward, but this is the plan that I believe delivers on Brexit for the British people and does so in a way that protects jobs and ensures that we have a smooth and orderly Brexit.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): I thank the Prime Minister for an advance copy of her statement. I share the sentiments in her remarks about Dawn Sturgess. The Prime Minister knows the commitment of the SNP to work with her when it comes to important matters of national security.

I should start by congratulating the departing Secretary of State for Exiting the EU on the whole four hours that he spent negotiating in Brussels and wish all the luck in the world to his replacement—he is going to need it. Then there is the departing Foreign Secretary. He should not have been allowed to resign; he should have been sacked for being a national embarrassment.

The Prime Minister’s proposals represent at best a starting point—a cherry-picking starting point. It is hard to believe that it has taken the Prime Minister two years to put together a proposal—two years to put it together and two days for the Cabinet to fall apart. There is, I believe, a majority in the House of Commons for staying in the single market and the customs union, so will the Prime Minister work with the rest of us to make sure that we can deliver on staying in the customs market and the single market, to deliver what is in the best interests of all our people? Will she stop kowtowing to her hard Brexiteers who are prepared to accept economic self-harm and the loss of jobs? Will she recognise that she now has to take on her extreme Brexiteers and work in the national interest of all the nations in the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister’s proposed facilitated customs arrangement has been called the “fudge of the century” by one senior EU official. The response from EU negotiators has been to see if the proposals are “workable” and “realistic”. I would not hold my breath. In her piece in The Daily Telegraph today, the Prime Minister has again noted that the UK Government continue to prepare for no deal. That is simply outrageous. To put the economy and jobs in such peril is a complete failure of leadership.

The absolute crisis that has engulfed the Conservative party over the past 17 hours is a national embarrassment. As the UK inches closer to the cliff-edge scenario, we see a Government in chaos and a Prime Minister struggling to lead her party—never mind her Government—and there have been seven resignations since the election a year ago. The Prime Minister must see sense and accept the mounting evidence against a hard Brexit raised by Opposition parties, the business community and the devolved Administrations. Will she work with the rest of us to stay in the customs union and the single market to protect jobs and ensure prosperity?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman commented on the preparations for no deal. It is entirely right and proper for this Government to make preparations for every eventuality, because we are going into a negotiation. It is right that we step up our preparations for no deal to ensure that we are able to deal with whatever comes at the end of the negotiations. The right hon. Gentleman’s key question—he asked it twice—was whether I would work with people across this House to stay in the single market and in the customs union. The answer is an absolute unequivocal no. We are leaving the single market and we are leaving the customs union.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): How does my right hon. Friend reconcile the Chequers statement with the one senior EU official. The response from EU negotiators has been to see if the proposals are “workable” and “realistic”. I would not hold my breath. In her piece in The Daily Telegraph today, the Prime Minister has again noted that the UK Government continue to prepare for no deal. That is simply outrageous. To put the economy and jobs in such peril is a complete failure of leadership.

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A majority in the House supports our retaining membership of the customs union and the single market, the original Common Market, or whatever name and label she wants to attach to it.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman refers, as the leader of the SNP did, to staying in the single market and staying in the customs union. We will not be staying in the single market, and we will not be staying in the customs union. To do so would involve keeping free movement, which would not be keeping faith with the vote of the British people. There will be an end to free movement from the European Union into this country as a result of our leaving the European Union.

Anna Soubry (Broxtowe) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister for this plan. In particular, I congratulate her on her leadership in the past few days. She said she would listen to business, and she clearly has listened to business. However, there are concerns that there are no details of the Government’s plan for services. What more detail can we expect to hear in the forthcoming White Paper?

The Prime Minister: There will be more detail in the forthcoming White Paper, but the point about services is that, for a variety of reasons—not least because services are an important sector for the United Kingdom—we believe it is important to maintain more flexibility in how we deal with them. On industrial goods, businesses are very clear that they will continue to meet EU rules, regardless of the position the Government take, because they want to continue to export to the European Union. On services, we want to be free to ensure that we are able to put in place what we believe is necessary to maintain our key position in services, not least in financial services. The global financial centre of the City of London needs to be maintained into the future, and we will continue to do that.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): The Prime Minister welcomed the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union to his post, and I join her in doing so. The Exiting the European Union Committee looks forward to seeing him appear before us very soon indeed.

The Government have indicated that the facilitated customs arrangement, even assuming the EU were to agree to it—a question about which there must be a great deal of doubt—will be fully operational only by the time of the next general election in 2022. Will the Prime Minister therefore now confirm to the House that, in light of that, the current transitional arrangement, which expires in December 2020, will inevitably have to be extended?

The Prime Minister: No.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): The Prime Minister is right to reaffirm that we are taking back control of our laws, our money and our borders, which I fully support, but will she clear away the ambiguity or contradictions in the Chequers statement that imply we will give the ECJ powers, we might pay money to trade, we might accept their laws and we might have their migration policy?

The Prime Minister: I am sure my right hon. Friend has read the Chequers statement very carefully but, actually, it did not say that. We will be ending free movement. As in any trade agreement we would strike with any country or group of countries around the world, there will be mode 4 provisions on mobility of investors and businesses, but we will be able to set our own immigration laws and immigration rules for people coming here from the European Union. We will be able to continue to set our own laws in the future.

It is not the case that the European Court of Justice will have jurisdiction in the United Kingdom—it will not. Businesses and individuals here in the United Kingdom will not be able to take cases to the European Court of Justice. Matters here in the UK will be determined by the UK courts.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): The Prime Minister’s plan is still a fudge, on immigration, on the European Court of Justice and on the “customs facilitated partnership maximum arrangement”—nobody understands what it is. She has kept trying to pander to different parts of the Conservative party, and today has shown that it just is not working. Will she instead put a plan for negotiations to the whole House of Commons for approval? When she is in such a mess she cannot just keep standing there saying, “Nothing has changed. Nothing has changed.” It has.

The Prime Minister: I did not say nothing has changed; I said our position had evolved. We have set out more details in our position, and I believe that it is the position that is absolutely right for the United Kingdom. It is the best Brexit deal for Britain; it gives us delivery on Brexit, protects jobs, and ensures that we maintain our commitment to Northern Ireland in relation to the border and that can have a smooth and orderly Brexit.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): The Prime Minister is not dealing with the theory of leaving the European Union—she is dealing with the practice of leaving the EU. Will she assure me that the Chequers agreement allows the continuation of the situation that has seen the UK get more inward investment over the past 30 years—under both parties—than we could possibly have anticipated? That is good news for the future of the engineering industry in our country, as well as all the other jobs that are so reliant on such industries.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right; we have seen good figures for foreign direct investment in the UK, supporting jobs in the UK. That will continue in the future. I believe that the plan I have set out, with its clear momentum for frictionless trade with the EU while giving us the freedom to strike trade deals around the world, will be welcomed by businesses and investors, and we will see more investment and more jobs in the UK.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Among the matters agreed in the Chequers communiqué, reference was made to the continuing obligation of the Government to the so-called backstop arrangement. I have heard the Prime Minister’s clear statement about the main deal as far as the Union is concerned, and I welcome it, but will she make it clear that as far as the backstop is concerned she stands by her rejection of the EU’s legal interpretation
and there will be no constitutional, political or regulatory differences between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman has invited me to do, let me say that I am happy to say that I continue to reject the protocol proposal of the so-called backstop put forward by the European Commission earlier this year. The fact that it would have effectively carved Northern Ireland away from the rest of the UK and kept it in the customs union and most of the single market would have meant that border down the Irish sea—that is completely unacceptable to the Government of the UK.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): Delivering the referendum result was always going to involve a series of compromises and trade-offs, and I want to support the position that the Prime Minister achieved with the Cabinet on Friday at Chequers, which absolutely puts business and jobs at the heart of any Brexit deal. That is in the national interest, and I think the Prime Minister has the vast majority of the country behind her in delivering a Brexit in the national interest. Is she able to say when we expect to hear the initial reaction from the European Union after publication of the White Paper on Thursday?

The Prime Minister: I have had conversations with a number of European leaders in recent days, and the indication is that they do feel this is a proposal that can ensure that we move the negotiations on and move them on at pace. I will be seeing a number of European leaders over the next couple of days; we are hosting the western Balkans summit tomorrow and then there is the NATO summit. I believe this plan is good for the UK, and the EU will see that it will lead to a deep and special partnership that will be in both our interests.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I believe the Prime Minister to be a rational human being, so why does she not save herself, us and the country a great deal of misery and grief by putting the option inexplicably ruled out at Chequers, the EEA-plus option, to this House in a free vote?

The Prime Minister: As I indicated in the statement that I made, the reason I do not think the EEA-plus option is right for the UK is that it does not deliver on the vote of the British people. That is our duty: it is our job as a Government to deliver the Brexit that the British people voted for.

Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): The announcement that the Government are preparing for a no-deal—an inaccurate term for moving to WTO terms, on which we trade with the vast majority of countries in the world—is very welcome and sensible. Given the intransigence and churlishness with which the EU has welcomed the Prime Minister’s generous offers so far, what is the date by which she judges it will be a “drop dead” moment at which to state that the talks are not progressing and that we will definitely go on to WTO terms?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend has been in a sufficient number of negotiations to know that it is not sensible to try to put a date on these matters in the way that he said. We have so far received a positive reaction to the proposals that we have put forward. We will go into intense and pacey negotiations with the European Union. I am clear that when this House comes to look at the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, it needs to have sufficient detail about the future relationship to be able to make that proper judgment.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The oddly named Chequers agreement fell apart after a weekend and is now the Chequers disagreement, as the Prime Minister’s Cabinet disintegrates before our eyes. Will she tell the House how on earth she is going to persuade the European Union to agree to her disagreement when her own Cabinet does not agree with it?

The Prime Minister: We have put forward the UK Government’s position and that has been received by the European Union as something on which there can be negotiations in future. We will go into those negotiations determined to deliver the best deal for Britain.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): What matters even more than the agreement reached at Chequers is the eventual agreement that this country reaches with the European Union, and what matters about that is that it promotes jobs and prosperity by helping British business. Will the Prime Minister assure the House that in the details of the White Paper that we will see on Thursday there will be a clear commitment to as free trade as possible across Britain’s borders with the European Union, to preserve jobs and prosperity for the future of this country?

The Prime Minister: I assure my right hon. Friend that maintaining that free trade across the borders between the United Kingdom and the European Union is important, which is why we have always said that we want as frictionless trade with the EU as possible. The plan that I have put forward, which the Government will set out in the White Paper later this week, will show how we can do exactly that: maintain those jobs but have the freedom to increase our prosperity with trade deals around the rest of the world.

Emma Reynolds (Wolverhampton North East) (Lab): Have any European leaders agreed to let the UK collect tariffs on their behalf?

The Prime Minister: We are putting forward the facilitated customs arrangement for the future as part of the negotiations for the plan for the future relationship.

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): May I say to my right hon. Friend how much we are looking forward to the publication of the White Paper on Thursday? Will she undertake to publish the White Paper that was set aside—the White Paper that was months in drafting by DExEU under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis)?

The Prime Minister: The White Paper that we publish on Thursday will be based on the work that has been done by DExEU over recent weeks and will of course reflect the decision taken by the Cabinet on Friday.
Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): The Prime Minister says that under her plan, we will not be subject to the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice, but the Chequers statement says that our courts will pay due regard to its case law and make joint references for rulings, which presumably will be binding. The big difference is that after 29 March, there will be no Scottish and no English judge on the Court of Justice. Will that not be the very definition of being subject to the jurisdiction of a foreign court that her Brexiteers so opposed?

The Prime Minister: No, and I understand that the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has already commented on this issue in response to a question that the hon. and learned Lady asked in another meeting. We will not be under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. That is one of the things that people voted for and that we will deliver.

Mr Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): The Prime Minister said that we would not be hindered from doing trade deals, but at a briefing given by 10 Downing Street, it was expressly stated that in signing the trans-Pacific partnership there would have to be a carve-out, because of our obligation to follow the common rulebook. Will my right hon. Friend explain what obstacles there will be to trade and how the process will work?

The Prime Minister: There are issues that we would look at in any circumstances as the United Kingdom in relation to standards and the way in which we wish to operate, which could lead to our not being able to undertake all the commitments that somebody might want in a free trade deal. We could tear up all our regulatory standards, but I do not think that that is what we should do. I do not think that that is what this House wants us to do, and I do not think that that is what the public wants us to do. As we go forward, we will be making those trade deals. We specifically looked at whether the plan that we were putting forward would enable us to accede to the comprehensive and progressive agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, and it will.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): I thank the Prime Minister for her statement. I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn) in welcoming the Brexit Secretary to his place. Might I ask that time is found to visit the elected political leaders of Europe to seek support for this plan, rather than just depend on the bureaucrats in Brussels?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I am speaking to elected leaders across Europe. The incoming Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab), will also be out and about in Europe, talking not just to leaders, but to politicians across Europe and in the European Parliament about the plan that we propose.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The EU says that it will not tolerate cherry picking, but what I fear is that we have picked the wrong cherry. By accepting a common rulebook in goods, we are locking ourselves into a sclerotic structure in which the EU has an overwhelming trading surplus. Will that not severely constrain our ability to make our business more competitive and to undertake free trade deals, which means that Brexit will no longer mean Brexit, and the Commission, where we will have no vote, regulating our business forever?

The Prime Minister: No. The position that my hon. Friend sets out is not the position for the future. I have been very clear that Parliament will be able to take these decisions about rules in the future. The reality and practicality of Brexit—somebody said earlier that I am dealing not with the theory, but with the reality and practicality of Brexit—is that our businesses which want to export to the European Union will continue to operate to the European Union's rulebook in industrial goods, just as when we sign trade deals with other parts of the world, we will need to ensure that both sides can operate to the rules that are appropriate there. Businesses will continue to apply these rules regardless. By operating in this way, we are able to ensure that frictionless border between the UK and the EU, which is important to delivering on our commitments for Northern Ireland while maintaining the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, and to ensuring that we maintain the jobs that rely on the integrated supply chains that have grown up over decades.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has proposed a free trade area for goods, but the fact is that our services sector has been left out and left behind by this Government. TechUK, which employs more than 700,000 workers in the technology sector, has said that a deal such as the one that she has proposed will reduce access to EU markets, will be confusing for consumers, and will add to complexity for business. Why is she ignoring these services, which make up most of the British economy?

The Prime Minister: This is not about ignoring services' businesses, but about seeing that that sector is one of the areas where we have great opportunities for trade deals around the rest of the world. It is also about recognising the importance and the significance of financial services in the City of London and the importance of ensuring that we can have not just regulatory co-operation, but the freedom to be flexible in these areas.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): On Saturday mornings, I lead the listening team in Wellingborough. We have an hour’s meeting when we talk about national and local politics and then we go out and campaign for two hours. This week, the activists were so disappointed about what had happened at Chequers that they said they had been betrayed. They said, “Why do we go out each and every Saturday to support the Conservative party to get MPs elected?” For the first time in more than 10 years, that group refused to go out to campaign. What does the Prime Minister say to them?

The Prime Minister: I am very sorry that my hon. Friend's activists did not feel able to go out and campaign. I would hope that they would campaign for their excellent Member of Parliament and be willing to support him on the doorsteps. This is not a betrayal. We will end free movement. We will end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. We will stop sending vast sums of money to the European Union every year. We will come out of the common agricultural policy. We will come
out of the common fisheries policy. I believe that that is what people voted for when they voted to leave, and we will deliver in faith with the British people.

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): My constituents who work at Airbus, Vauxhall Motors, Jaguar Land Rover, Unilever and many other parts of our modern manufacturing supply chain have had their voice heard, but they need to be heard more, because they need not just what is in the Chequers statement. When will the Prime Minister go further and accept that we need to include more in this deal and that we need to be part of the internal market of the European Union?

The Prime Minister: We are very clear that we will not be members of the single market, because of the full set of requirements that that brings, including free movement. The hon. Lady refers to Vauxhall, which has of course announced that it will invest in a new manufacturing platform and boost production at its commercial vehicle plant in Luton; that will safeguard 1,400 jobs. There have been other positive announcements from the automotive sector. We have recognised the integrated supply chains and the need for frictionless trade across the border, and that is what this plan delivers.

Sir Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): May I give the Prime Minister a message from Mid Sussex, to this end—that despite the inevitable slings and arrows, will she stick to her guns to deliver a Brexit that is in line with the interests of our people, their prosperity and their security?

The Prime Minister: That is exactly my aim and that of this Government—to deliver a Brexit that is smooth and orderly, that maintains the prosperity of this country and indeed enables it to be enhanced in the future, but that maintains our important security co-operation for the safety and security of citizens.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): When the Prime Minister took office she said that she wanted to bring the country back together, and I believe that she had the will of most people in this House and the country. Some 69% of British people now think that Brexit is going badly, her Cabinet is horribly split, the Government are split, the nation is more divided than ever, and our people will be poorer as a consequence of this deal that leaves out services. Will she now commit to giving the people a second vote on this deal?

The Prime Minister: No, I will not commit to doing that, and the reason that I will not is that the British people voted. This House and this Parliament gave the British people the vote. The British people made their choice and they want their Government to deliver on that choice. Given that 80% of people at the last election voted for parties that were committed to delivering Brexit, I think that it is time that the Labour party ruled out a second referendum.

Andrea Jenkyns (Morley and Outwood) (Con): In my constituency, 60% voted to leave the EU. Within 48 hours of the Prime Minister’s statement on Friday, I received over 300 emails—disheartened, dismayed and telling me that democracy is dead. Will the Prime Minister tell the House how she plans to restore faith in my constituents that this is not a sell-out?

The Prime Minister: People from across the country, wherever they voted to leave—I understand that my hon. Friend has received comments not just from her constituents on this matter—wanted to see an end to free movement. We will deliver that. They wanted us to stop sending vast amounts of money to the EU every year. We will deliver that. They wanted us to end the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice in the UK. We will deliver that. They wanted to come out of the common agricultural policy. We will deliver that. They wanted to come out of the common fisheries policy. We will deliver that. We will deliver Brexit that people voted for, but we will do so in a way that ensures that we protect jobs, maintain our commitments to the precious Union of the United Kingdom, and can go out and do trade deals around the rest of the world that will bring jobs to my hon. Friend’s constituency and others.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): The new Brexit Secretary has proudly advocated no deal, claiming that we would thrive. He has suggested that we might have to abandon the common travel area with Ireland. He has suggested scrapping the working time directive. In 2013, he voted against crucial police and justice co-operation across Europe that will be key to any security treaty. Are those things now Government policy, and if not, why did the Prime Minister appoint him?

The Prime Minister: The Government’s policy is very clear. I have set it out this afternoon. Further details will be in the White Paper. The Brexit Secretary looks forward to delivering on that Government policy.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Will the Prime Minister assure me that we will not charge the EU any more for access to our markets than we would expect to be charged?

The Prime Minister: One of the key features of the facilitated customs arrangement that people may not have seen is that we would recognise that the European Union would effectively be taking tariffs for UK goods that would enter other European Union countries to come to the United Kingdom. We would make sure that that was reflected in the arrangements that are made in relation to the facilitated customs arrangement.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Today the Welsh Affairs Committee published a report recommending continued membership of the single market and the customs union on the basis of evidence received about agriculture. If whoever is in government does not come to the same conclusion, we will all wake up on 30 March without a functioning Government and without a functioning deal. For all our sakes, when will the Prime Minister push for an extension to article 50? This is a negotiation with people’s livelihoods, not a game against the clock.

The Prime Minister: This is a negotiation that is of vital importance to the United Kingdom and to our future as global Britain, and that, with the plan that we have put forward, will be about protecting jobs and livelihoods for people across the whole of the
United Kingdom. We are not—we are not—extending article 50. We have a negotiation, we have a plan for that negotiation, and we will go to it at pace.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the reasons companies have come to this country, and that British companies have become involved in integrated European manufacturing, is that for more than 30 years we have had a settled rulebook about trade in goods? Does she agree—I thank the Cabinet for agreeing to this—that the proposal is right to protect that business and to ensure that we keep those jobs?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right: the rulebook in relation to industrial goods has been broadly settled over a number of decades and is not expected to change significantly in the future. Businesses continue to work to that and would do so after we have left the European Union. The position we have taken, which protects jobs, is absolutely right.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I beg the Prime Minister to think again? It is obvious, even from today’s proceedings, that for all her hard work at Chequers, she is still imprisoned by a group of hard Brexit ideologues. Will she change her mind, speak to those who have a real desire for the national interest in withdrawing from the European Union, and take a rather different view on having a vote in Parliament on the Chequers agreement?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman talks about operating in the national interest. That is exactly what the Government are doing. It is exactly why we are putting this proposal forward. We will negotiate with the European Union on the basis of this proposal, and of course, in due course, Parliament will have its opportunity to vote through the meaningful vote and on the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill.

Mrs Anne Main (St Albans) (Con): My right hon. Friend refers to negotiations. Of course, negotiations are about give and take, and some people may think we have given rather too much, but I am actually not sure that the European Union will take it—I think it will want us to give a little more, and a little more. Will she recall Parliament over the summer if, in those deep and pacy negotiations, we are asked to give even more?

The Prime Minister: Although I recognise the good intentions with which my hon. Friend asked that question, I suspect that it did not quite receive the full approval of the entire House.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Prime Minister should have sacked her Foreign Secretary some time ago, given that he is someone who put himself before his party. She now risks putting her party before her country. How can she possibly persuade us that she can negotiate with strength with Brussels when it is clear that she leads a divided House and is struggling to take back control of her Cabinet, never mind anything else?

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet has agreed the position that the Government are taking forward. The right hon. Gentleman asks about the ability to achieve in negotiations. I simply point out that that is exactly what we have been doing at every stage in these negotiations.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: In noticing the hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), I note with approval that the bright shirt he is wearing is more reminiscent of Arsenal than of West Ham.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): Thank you for that endorsement, Mr Speaker.

My constituency contributes roughly half a billion pounds to the GDP of this nation, mainly through small and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the most important thing we must achieve is that those small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the lifeblood of this country, are able to supply the big companies, no matter where they are able to trade, and that this deal allows them to expand in all other parts of the world as well?

The Prime Minister: That is exactly what this deal does. By ensuring that we have frictionless trade across the border with the European Union and in the facilitated customs arrangement we have put forward, we are ensuring that those businesses that currently only trade with the European Union will have no extra requirements in terms of customs, and therefore that we are not increasing the burdens on those businesses.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): In the Prime Minister’s initial letter to Donald Tusk notifying the European Commission that she wanted to trigger article 50, she said that if there was no deal, there would be no deal on security. I do not think she was making a threat—she was simply stating the truth and the facts—but since then, the European Union has made it clear that it is not sure that it wants precisely the same version of security co-operation that we have talked about. It now says that we will not be able to be a member of the European arrest warrant. Is not this issue of national security as important as it was on the day that she wrote that letter, and is it not therefore most important that we get a deal?

The Prime Minister: Of course the issue of national security is important. We want to maintain operational capabilities. As the hon. Gentleman will see when the White Paper comes out, in the security partnership that I outlined in my Munich speech and that we are putting further details on, we want to ensure that operational capabilities through instruments, programmes and agencies are still available to the United Kingdom. That will be part of the negotiations that we take forward, and a security partnership is an important element of our future relationship.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): Could my right hon. Friend say what distinction she would draw between a combined customs territory, which the Cabinet appears to consider desirable, and a customs union, which it does not?
The Prime Minister: I am very happy to answer my right hon. Friend’s question. In a customs union, it would be necessary to be part of the common commercial policy, which would not enable us to sign trade deals with other countries around the world. In the arrangement that we have put forward, we will be free to sign trade deals around the rest of the world.

Seema Malhotra (Feltham and Heston) (Lab/Co-op): The Government’s proposals effectively seem to seek to reproduce parts of the backstop proposal for the whole of the UK, but with a Swiss-style dispute settlement system. What will the Prime Minister’s proposals mean for the mutual recognition of health professionals’ qualifications so that they can operate cross-border?

The Prime Minister: That is one of the areas in which we will be entering negotiations with the European Union. We want to ensure that we see recognition in a number of areas in relation to professionals and professional services but, of course, that is something that we have to agree with the European Union.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): The Prime Minister knows my constituency well, and my constituents know her to be a lady of integrity who puts the national interest first; she has done that in this deal, and I commend her for it. Many of the businesses in my constituency are concerned about non-tariff barriers. Can she confirm that this agreement overrides their concerns and that they will be free to trade over those non-tariff barriers?

The Prime Minister: The point of the deal that we have put out and the proposal that we will be presenting to the European Union is that we can have the ability for free trade between the United Kingdom and the remaining EU27. That is partly about frictionless borders, but it also about the standards and regulations to which those businesses will continue to operate.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): There is obviously disagreement in the Prime Minister’s party, as there is in the Labour party, about what the people actually voted for in 2016. Is it not time to clarify this with the people? With respect, I do not accept, as is being said, that the people themselves rather than always to be guessing? With the difficulties that we have in the current relationship between the EU and the UK. There are only nine meetings of the European Parliament in Strasbourg before we will have left. May I urge the Prime Minister and members of the Cabinet to keep focused on the timetable and deliver that deal?

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): The Prime Minister has always been very clear that she seeks a bespoke proposal in the national interest. There are differences from other European Union leaders we have to agree with the European Union, and also in recognising the role that the European Parliament will play, because it will need to agree to the withdrawal agreement when it has been finalised.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has been struggling quite cleverly within the constraints of her self-imposed chains and red lines. Would it not be a bit easier for her if she acted in the way that Clement Attlee acted in the 1941 crisis and we worked together in the national interest to deal with this crisis? Carrying on as we are will not succeed, and she knows it.

The Prime Minister: The Government have put forward a proposal in the national interest. There are differences across this House, as has been obvious from a number of Opposition Members who want us to stay in a customs union and want us to stay in the single market, which in my view would not be keeping faith with the vote of the British people.

Mr John Baron (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): It is generally accepted that the EU has a poor track record on trade deals, in large part because of its protectionist rules and regulations. Does the Prime Minister accept that,
in pursuing a common rulebook and promising harmonisation, we would be obliging importers from third countries to abide by those same regulations and therefore make trade deals more difficult to achieve?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, we could of course tear up the regulatory standards we have in the United Kingdom, but I do not believe that that would be the right thing to do. I also do not believe that the House would support it. When we look at trade deals around the rest of world, we see that there are decisions to take, as in any trade deal, about the basis on which trade goes forward, and about the standards that both sides will apply in those deals. However, I believe it is right that the United Kingdom maintains high regulatory standards in a number of areas.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The customs Bill and the Trade Bill were both drafted several months ago. In the Chequers agreement, the Prime Minister has set out a rather complicated new customs arrangement. Will the legislation that the House will consider next week need any changes?

The Prime Minister: No, I do not believe it will.

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): It is just over 16 months since the Foreign Affairs Committee unanimously—leavers and remainers together—concluded that “the previous Government’s decision not to instruct key Departments to plan for a ‘leave’ vote in the EU referendum amounted to gross negligence. Making an equivalent mistake would constitute a serious dereliction of duty by the present Administration.”

Does my right hon. Friend understand the relief that the no-deal preparations will be overt, and will she ensure that the resources and commitment that may have been absent from the preparations are given to this important task to show the steel in our position?

The Prime Minister: As I am sure my hon. Friend knows, we have allocated a significant amount—£3 billion over two years, £1.5 billion of which has already been allocated to Departments—for Departments to do their work on preparing for leaving the European Union. Some of that work will relate to what might be necessary in getting a deal, and other work will relate to what would be necessary if there were no deal. Work has already been undertaken by Departments, but we are now stepping up the pace and intensity of that work.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): On Friday night, after the Chequers meeting, the Prime Minister announced that there would be a change to the proposals to ensure that work is step up on a daily basis. Before Friday, he feared that high-value capital equipment across EU-UK borders at short notice could not be delivered to the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that small businesses form the backbone of our economy. It is right that we have heard from businesses large and small about their interest in maintaining frictionless trade across our EU-UK borders. That is exactly what we will be delivering in this proposal.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): There is an air of complete unreality this afternoon, because it should be blindly obvious from the resignations of the Foreign Secretary and the Brexit Secretary, and from the constituency of opinion they represent on the Government Benches, that there is no majority in the House for the Chequers deal—it is dead. No European leader ought to take it seriously because it will not pass through the House. The question for the Prime Minister is this: when will she finally accept that trying to appease the hard Brexiteers on the Conservative Benches will never work? She can reach across, but she must also accept that Opposition Members will never vote for a deal that delivers, yes, a softer Brexit on goods, but a hard Brexit on services.

The Prime Minister: Through all of these decisions, I have had people complaining that I have taken the view of this side of the argument or taken the view of the absolute opposite side. What I have done is put forward what is in the national interest for the best Brexit deal for Britain.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): Will the Prime Minister explain to the House how the new UK-EU free trade agreement will ensure that London retains its status as the global trading capital of Europe? To do that, is it not best that the rulebook is made in Britain?

The Prime Minister: If we look at the two areas of goods and services, what is very clear is that those who will be trading with the European Union will continue to operate according to that rulebook in the European Union. Where we need to ensure we have that flexibility—particularly to protect one of the key areas for London, which is the City of London as a global financial centre providing a significant proportion of the debt and equity that underpins business across the European Union, with the risks that that entails here in the United Kingdom—it is right that we have regulatory co-operation with others, but that we are able to have rather more flexibility on services. That will be good for London.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): The Prime Minister has today presented her position on the negotiating position decided at Chequers as an evolution of her Mansion House statement. Most Members believe there will have to be a further evolution of that position before the House will agree a deal. On that basis, does the Prime Minister agree that it is crucial to keep business in all parts of the economy—services and manufacturing—at the heart of the negotiating process?
The Prime Minister: What is important to keep at the heart of the negotiating process is our duty to deliver on Brexit for the people of the United Kingdom, and to do that in a smooth and orderly way that protects jobs and livelihoods while ensuring our commitment to our precious Union of the United Kingdom. That is exactly what the Government will be doing.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister recognise the overwhelming support she has for the pragmatic and collaborative approach she has taken in outlining these Brexit proposals, taking the lead to find a way forward that shows us the compromise needed to bring a divided country back together and, crucially, to safeguard our economy? One of the qualities we expect in a Prime Minister is to lead and not quit when the going gets tough.

The Prime Minister: It is absolutely the case that on such issues it is important that we come to a decision that I and the Government believe is in the UK’s national interest and will deliver a good Brexit deal for the United Kingdom. That is where our focus is and will continue to be.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): The Prime Minister has opted, finally, for a high degree of alignment with the European Union—she is right to have done so. The Government and the EU intend that the UK will stay in the large number of international agreements with countries outside the EU covering trade and other areas, but that will require agreement from those non-EU countries. What progress has there been so far in securing agreement from those countries?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman is right in that we are looking to maintain those agreements. Of course, once we are out of the European Union, it will then be possible for us to enhance and improve those agreements in negotiation with those countries. Discussions have been held with a number of countries, and also with the European Commission, which itself has indicated its recognition that this is the right way forward.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Crispin Blunt), every single Government in every single particular will need to be ready when we leave the European Union, which could perhaps be as early as 29 March next year. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister agree to publish more information so that Parliament can be reassured in this respect?

The Prime Minister: We have always been clear that we will keep Parliament informed. One of the things I said at Lancaster House was that we would provide information generally as and when it was possible to do so. My hon. Friend said, I think, “if” we leave the European Union on 29 March 2019. Let me just confirm that we will be leaving on 29 March 2019.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): It may be possible that European leaders welcome this plan simply because it is the first thing to make it on to paper. The Prime Minister talks about sticking to a common rulebook for goods but not services, but is it not the case that goods and services are often combined, particularly in the aerospace industry, which is important in my constituency?

The Prime Minister: This is not the first time that the Government have put something down on paper in relation to proposals for the future, but we have evolved the position since the Mansion House speech that I made about this. The industrial goods rulebook—we have used that term—is recognised and has been stable over quite a number of years, as has been pointed out by Conservative Members. Businesses, including the aerospace industry, were very clear that it was that rulebook that they wanted to continue to operate by, and that that would protect jobs. That is why we have taken this step.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): The Brexit Secretary has unfortunately resigned. He, at least in theory, was leading our negotiations with the European Union. For months, his Department had been working on a detailed White Paper, but that was not presented to the Cabinet at Chequers; it was presented with a different plan. I echo the call made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin), which was that that DExEU White Paper should now be published so that the House and the country have a chance to see the alternative options that DExEU had proposed.

The Prime Minister: It was always clear that the White Paper, which will be published as a DExEU White Paper, would reflect the Government’s position, and the White Paper that is published next week will do exactly that.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): Now that even senior members of the Government are resigning—DExEU’s midnight runners and the Foreign Secretary—because they think that we are heading for a bad Brexit deal, I suggest to the Prime Minister that at the end of the negotiations, she could put herself in a strong position by holding a people’s vote to validate the final deal. What is she scared of?

The Prime Minister: I think that I have covered this point on a number of occasions. It remains unfortunate that the Labour party is not willing to rule out a second referendum. This House—this Parliament—overwhelmingly gave the people of this country the decision and the choice whether to leave the European Union. They voted. I think that the vast majority of the public out there want their Government to deliver on that—not to have a second referendum, but to have faith with the British people and deliver on their vote.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Seventy per cent. of my constituents voted for Brexit. In the past two years, they have become increasingly frustrated at the progress and concessions that have been made. That frustration is now turning into anger. What can the Prime Minister say to reassure them that there will be no further concessions?

The Prime Minister: First, I believe that the important message to my hon. Friend’s constituents and others is that we are delivering on the key issues that led to people voting to leave the European Union—an end to...
free movement, no more vast sums of money going to the EU every year, and our coming out of the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy and out of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. He talks about their concerns about the timetable. It is precisely to ensure that we are able to reach the end of our negotiations this autumn—such that, where we have a deal, we have those proposals in place by 29 March 2019—that we are presenting this proposal to the European Union. His constituents will see us leave the European Union on 29 March 2019.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): Contrary to what the Prime Minister has repeatedly told the House today, the EEA agreement does in fact enable the suspension and reform of free movement of labour, removes the direct effect of EU law and sits outside the jurisdiction of the ECA. The Chequers proposal, however, is a bureaucratic nightmare that is riddled with ambiguity and complexity. Why does the Prime Minister stop trying to reinvent the wheel and commit instead to an EEA-based Brexit?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman might have noticed that this House had an opportunity to vote on the EEA issue within the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and voted overwhelmingly against membership of the EEA.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): I welcome the agreement that the Cabinet reached last week and urge the Prime Minister to hold firm in the national interest. Does she agree that what we have forms the basis for a good deal for Scotland—frictionless trade with the European Union, out of the common fisheries policy and maintaining and preserving the integrity of the UK’s internal market?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This will be a good deal for Scotland. Crucially, it does deliver on what I believe Scotland wants, which is to come out of the common fisheries policy, and of course it maintains the UK’s internal market, which is of significant benefit to Scotland and is instead of more consequence to Scotland than its trade with the European Union.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said clearly in her statement today that she sees an end to the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice over UK matters. How does she square that with continued membership of the European arrest warrant?

The Prime Minister: We are clear that as we go forward in these negotiations we will look at how we could operate the various operational capabilities in the security arrangement to the benefit of citizens in both the UK and the EU. Our position on the European Court of Justice remains, however, and of course changes were made to the operation of the EAW when I was Home Secretary, not under the jurisdiction of the ECJ but under the laws of this country as determined by this House.

Anne Marie Morris (Newton Abbot) (Con): Prime Minister, I have listened very carefully to everything you have said today, and I have read very carefully everything you have circulated. I even went to one of the briefings you organised today, and I was struck by the reply from your presenter every time there was a question about why we could not have something better than what was on the piece of paper presented: we were told that the EU simply would not agree. I have gone carefully through everything, and I cannot see how what was agreed at Chequers will deliver Brexit, either hard or soft. There is much use of “indirect” instead of “direct”, but it will not deliver Brexit. Please, Prime Minister, the people would like you to stand up to Mr Barnier and say “No.” I would like you to bear that in mind when you consider what to put in the White Paper to make Brexit deliver the economic dividend it should.

Mr Speaker: Order. I allowed the hon. Lady to complete her question, but may I gently encourage her to remember that we do not use the word “you” here? She has now been a Member for eight years, and I look to her to set an example to new colleagues who require leadership.

The Prime Minister: It is precisely because we are saying “No” to the proposals put forward by the European Commission that we are putting forward our own proposal, which is much more ambitious and comprehensive than those from the EU and, I believe, is in the best interests of this country.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I do not know whether Members have seen the breaking news, but apparently one report is saying, “Theresa May will contest any motion of no confidence.” Does the Prime Minister anticipate such a vote and who does she think might challenge her?

The Prime Minister: Nice try, but I am getting on with the job of delivering what the British people want.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Ind): I welcome the Prime Minister’s statement that no deal preparations will be stepped up. What are those preparations; how will they be stepped up; will they include new money; and most importantly, will they include the delivery of the lorry park on the roads to the channel ports that was promised two years ago but has not yet been delivered by the Department for Transport?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, £1.5 billion has already been allocated, and the Chancellor has made £3 billion available over two years for the various preparations, which include the no deal preparations. The new Brexit Secretary will take on the task of ensuring that we step up those no deal preparations. I know from previous discussions the concern my hon. Friend has about the potential lorry park in Kent in relation to the port of Dover. He champions the rights and needs of his constituents very eloquently in this House.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): With the setback of four ministerial resignations and March 2019 bearing down upon us, will the Prime Minister think again about the extension of article 50? It would enable her to hold a vote on the final deal, which I know she is not in favour of, and give her additional time in the negotiations with the EU to secure a better deal than the one she might be about to secure.
The Prime Minister: No, we are not going to extend article 50. We have a timetable; we are working to it; and we will leave on 29 March 2019.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con) rose—

Mr Speaker: I call James Cartlidge.

James Cartlidge: The largest employer in my constituency is Philips AVENT, the baby care company, which employs 1,500 people. At the weekend, its chief executive made it clear that in the event of a hard Brexit that plant could close, which would be a massive shock to my local economy. May I say to my right hon. Friend that, although there is a lot of excitement about certain jobs being lost in this place, I will be supporting her negotiating position because it prioritises the jobs that matter—those of our constituents?

The Prime Minister: The route that we are taking is a route that delivers on Brexit and delivers on the vote of the British people, but does so in a way that protects jobs and livelihoods and maintains the other commitments that we have made. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: people talk about things in this House, but it is the jobs of our constituents that we should be concerned about.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): The Government are in utter chaos over a Cabinet agreement that has taken two years to achieve, to which the EU may never agree and that covers barely 20% of our economy. If it is such a good agreement, why has the Prime Minister lost two Secretaries of State who were in charge of the Brexit negotiations?

The Prime Minister: The agreement that we have reached, which will be reflected in the White Paper to be published later this week, will set out our intentions across the whole of our economy. We made some very specific proposals in relation to industrial goods, but we will cover the other aspects of our economy and the flexibility that we believe is right in those areas for the future.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the mobility framework will be part of an immigration system that we control and we deliver for our economic needs, while ending the free movement of labour?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to give my hon. Friend that commitment. We will end free movement. As we come to this agreement with the European Union, there will of course be the question of what would, in a trade agreement, be a mode 4 mobility proposal. We will seek to ensure that we offer those mode 4 arrangements in the trade agreements that we reach with the rest of the world as well, but, crucially, we will also put in place our own immigration rules in relation to immigration here from the European Union.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): The BBC’s political correspondent has tweeted that the 48 letters have been received. Is the Prime Minister certain that there will no further resignations from her Government over this today?

The Prime Minister: The Government have only one interest in jobs, and that is their interest in the jobs of the people of this country, and in ensuring prosperity in the future.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): Brexit has divided the country. With that in mind, may I suggest to my right hon. Friend that it is essential for us to pursue a Brexit that is true to the referendum result and supports the aspirations and incomes of people whose jobs depend on trade with the European Union?

The Prime Minister: That is precisely the approach that the Government have taken. We want a smooth and orderly Brexit. We want a Brexit that protects jobs and livelihoods. However, we also want to keep faith with the British people and deliver on what they voted for, and that is exactly what we will do.

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): It has been argued that the policy that was agreed at Chequers at the weekend was necessary to protect the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom, because it would avoid the need to implement the backstop arrangement with the Irish Republic. Is it part of the agreement that the Government will sign a legally binding protocol with the EU that would treat Northern Ireland differently? If not, why is it necessary to have a divisive future trade arrangement that is designed to protect the constitutional integrity of the United Kingdom if that was never in jeopardy?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, we have rejected the European Union’s proposal in relation to the protocol. The expectation is that there will be a protocol in the withdrawal agreement, but we have always made clear our belief that the best resolution of the issue of the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland will come within the overall trading relationship that we develop between the United Kingdom and the EU, and that is exactly what this plan delivers.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): Will the Prime Minister assure me that, in the event that EU negotiators reject the Brexit agreement, she will rule out any further concessions?

The Prime Minister: We have put forward the plan that we believe is the right plan for the United Kingdom. By virtue of its going into negotiation, there are elements of this that we will be negotiating, but we have put forward the plan and the basis on which we believe we can deliver the best Brexit for Britain.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Prime Minister has outlined a hard Brexit for services. As she will know, people in the tech sector are concerned because they need to keep up with the changes in the world. Last week in the European Parliament, the copyright directive was a hugely important decision, in which our MEPs played a huge role, and our constituents were able to
lobby them. Under the Prime Minister’s proposals, how will we have that kind of influence in future, or will we be like the Italians not watching their football team and wondering why it is not on the pitch in the World cup?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman refers to the issue around services; some of his hon. Friends are complaining that we are going to provide ourselves with flexibility in services precisely to be able to deal with this issue on that more international basis, so I am really not sure why he is taking this position. It is right that we will have greater flexibility in relation to services for the future, and many of the issues we are dealing with in services are dealt with on that international basis, rather than the European basis.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): The Prime Minister has rightly been consistent from her Lancaster House speech onwards in promising to deliver the three freedoms of retaining control of our laws, our borders and our money. Much of this deal does that, but will she expand on how we will square those promises with a shared rulebook on traded goods and whether we are still delivering on those three freedoms?

The Prime Minister: I believe we are still delivering on the promises we have made. We will not be sending those vast sums of money to the EU every year; we will be able to use that money—that Brexit dividend as it has been called—to put money into our public services, and I have already indicated what we will be doing in relation to the national health service. The jurisdiction of the ECJ will end in the UK, and we will have control of our borders because we will be deciding—we will be setting the rules for immigration here in the UK.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Given the new Brexit Secretary’s on-the-record and public views on scrapping the agency workers directive and TUPE regulations, what confidence should my constituents have that these regulations will be maintained post Brexit?

The Prime Minister: Constituents across the country can have confidence in a Government who have been very clear that we will not reduce workers’ rights standards. Indeed, this Government have pledged to enhance workers’ rights, which is precisely why we asked Matthew Taylor to do the report on new forms of employment, so we can ensure workers’ rights and legislation around employment are keeping pace with the changing employment market.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): I do not religiously read every tweet that emanates from the hands of President Trump, so I do not know what his views are on the Chequers deal, but the Prime Minister is meeting him later this week. Will she be discussing the exciting potential for trade deals with the USA, and does she believe there is anything in this Chequers deal that could possibly inhibit that trade deal?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that trade will be one of the issues I discuss with President Trump, as indeed other key issues will be, such as security and defence; as my hon. Friend knows, the United States is our longest-standing and deepest security and defence partner. The proposal we are presenting to the EU enables us to sign trade deals around the rest of the world, but I would caution hon. Members that of course, when any trade deal is being signed, the United Kingdom will take a decision on what standards it wants to continue to abide by and will make decisions on whether those standards will be changed or torn up, possibly affecting that trade deal. But that will be a decision for us here in the UK.

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): The UK’s textile and fashion industry contributes £28 billion annually and textiles are a significant contributor to our Scottish economy. I am chair of the all-party group on textile and fashion. The industry is concerned about the passporting of goods and of highly specialist services, so how does the plan protect creative industry services? Will the Prime Minister do this and ensure no fashion faux pas going forward?

The Prime Minister: When the hon. Lady sees the White Paper that will be published later this week, she will see that it will cover the issue of the creative industries.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I cannot believe that the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) is standing up; he was absent from the Chamber for some considerable period—but perhaps he is waiting for the next statement. I call Jeremy Lefroy.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): May I join my right hon. Friend for his paying tribute to his right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for all the work that they did on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and much else, and to my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) for all his work in representing the United Kingdom? I pay particular tribute to him for his work in Africa.

Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister tell me how the association agreement, which is being put forward following the Chequers agreement, will ensure that we put national security, economic prosperity and our United Kingdom at the heart of our negotiating objectives?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his question, which gives me the opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) on the hard work that he put in on the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. He did a very good job on that legislation.

The point about the association agreement is that it provides a framework within which it is possible to set the various other agreements that we come to on trade and security, in order to do exactly as my hon. Friend suggests and ensure that the deal we are putting forward is the right one for the UK.

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): Over the past few weeks, great concern has been expressed by major manufacturing companies, by farmers and by the service sector in north Wales over the Government’s approach to Brexit. Those people do not have a political axe to grind. They are deeply concerned about jobs and about
our economy. What confidence can we have that the Government and the Prime Minister will listen to them, bearing in mind that the deal that was agreed around the Cabinet table is unravelling as we speak and is very unlikely to secure any agreement anywhere?

The Prime Minister: We have been listening to manufacturers, to businesses, to farmers and to others up and down the country who provide jobs, and that is precisely why we have come forward with a proposal that delivers on Brexit, but does so in a way that protects jobs and livelihoods.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I warmly welcome the decision to seek membership of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Can my right hon. Friend give me some indication of the value to the UK economy of such membership, and has she received any indication from any of the other signatories that there is anything in the Chequers agreement that would inhibit UK membership?

The Prime Minister: The opportunity to join the TPP is something that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade has been championing since he came into office. He has been very clear on that particular issue. This morning, the Prime Minister of Australia said that he welcomed the interest that the United Kingdom was showing in the TPP. As we looked at the Chequers agreement, one of the things we looked at was whether it would enable us to join the TPP, and it would.

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): We know that on Friday night the entire Cabinet supported the Prime Minister’s position, but as of today, that is no longer the case for two of her now former colleagues. Can she tell us what further information has come to light in the intervening period to cause her colleagues to change their minds?

The Prime Minister: The Chequers agreement remains as it was: the agreement that we took on Friday. I did indicate collective responsibility at that time, and two members of the Cabinet have chosen to stand down.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s commitment to pursuing accession to the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would give us the opportunity to have closer trading links with some of the world’s fastest-growing economies. Will she seize the moment with President Trump here this week to raise the question of whether the United States of America might reconsider its relationship with the proposed TPP?

The Prime Minister: I think we will take this one stage at a time. Let us focus on the United Kingdom’s membership of TPP, but perhaps that will give a message to the United States.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Prime Minister has spoken of maintaining high regulatory standards, but the proposal for a post-Brexit environmental regulatory body put forward just a few weeks ago by her Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs contained no watchdog powers to bring legal action and no commitment to enshrine current environmental principles such as the polluter pays principle. How will her Government ensure that those high regulatory standards are fully protected?

The Prime Minister: Separate bodies are not required to ensure that the Government are delivering high environmental standards. The Government are committed to them and the hon. Lady will see us continuing to be so.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): The Chequers agreement delivers on the referendum result and lays the foundations for future trade. Anyone who truly has the nation’s interests at heart should support it. However, when it comes to the negotiations, does the Prime Minister agree that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, and that we will therefore not sign a £39 billion cheque until we get some assurance that the Chequers agreement, or something very similar to it, will be agreed to?

The Prime Minister: It was the European Union that used the phrase “nothing is agreed until everything is agreed”. The Government have been clear that when we come to finalise the withdrawal agreement we need not only sufficient detail on the future relationship, but a linkage between the two. It is a package. They are not separate issues.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister must now know that her fate is inextricably tied to the success or failure of her maximum facilitation customs proposal. I understand that she has been eager to solicit the views of the other 27 EU member states, so how many member states has she consulted? Given that her own Cabinet has failed to support the idea over the past 24 hours, is she confident that member states will continue to support it in the next round of negotiations?

The Prime Minister: We have put forward a facilitated customs arrangement. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the details of the various models that were proposed, he will see that his question is not entirely factually correct. However, we will be negotiating such matters with the European Union.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that her Chequers proposals would prevent the mutual recognition of standards, even with highly developed countries such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand, effectively ruling out free trade agreements?

The Prime Minister: The proposals would not prevent free trade agreements with those countries, but there is a challenge for us in relation to the United States and standards. We have always supported a single standards model, but the United States has a multiple standards approach, so that would be an issue. However, this deal enables us to sign trade deals around the world.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Fishing is important across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. My constituency voted to leave, and the village of Portavogie, almost to a man and almost to a woman, wants out of the EU. Will the Prime Minister reassure this House that we will control our fishing waters, quotas and days at sea and that we will have an unlettered, free fishing sector that is in our hands in this House?
The Prime Minister: I can give the hon. Gentleman that reassurance. We will come out of the common fisheries policy, and we will be an independent coastal state. It will then be for us to negotiate in the normal annual negotiations access to our waters and our fishermen’s access to other waters.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, under her proposals, including the common rulebook, the United Kingdom will be able to ban live animal exports and introduce other animal welfare standards that our membership of the European Union currently prevents us from implementing?

The Prime Minister: We would be able to enhance our standards, but we would have committed to that rulebook in a number of areas. In agriculture and agri-foods, different levels of rules currently operate. What we are talking about for the common rulebook includes sanitary and phytosanitary conditions, and there are other aspects, such as the common agricultural framework, to which this does not relate.

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): May I first congratulate and thank the Prime Minister? She has had a busy few days, but has managed to be at the Dispatch Box for the best part of the past couple of hours.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the arrangements are positive for business and jobs by establishing a free trade area to enable the frictionless trade that is so important for manufacturers operating in just-in-time supply chains, such as in the automotive and aerospace sectors? At the same time, will she provide the flexibility to pursue trade opportunities around the world?

The Prime Minister: Yes. We want to ensure two things—we want to continue to have a good trading relationship and to be able to do trade deals around the world. Our proposals for frictionless trade do exactly what my hon. Friend says and will ensure that we maintain those integrated supply chains and the jobs that rely on them.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): One of the key reasons why people in Corby voted to leave was to set up a proper trade defence instrument in this country so we can take the right steps, when we need to, to protect our industries against unfair dumping on our market. Will that be the case under this set-up?

The Prime Minister: Yes. When the White Paper is produced, my hon. Friend will be able to see the arrangements that will be put in place for trade remedies and sanctions.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): A greater proportion of my constituents voted to leave the European Union than in any other constituency, and what they say to me today is, “Please can we just get on with it?” The deal negotiated at Chequers delivers on bringing decisions on immigration, money and law back to this House. Please will the Prime Minister get on with it, and will she urge the European Union to get on with it?

The Prime Minister: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. I hope and expect that we will now see a greater pace and intensity in the negotiations, because we want to ensure that we meet the October deadline for coming to an agreement.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that services make up nearly 80% of the UK economy? Yet there never has been, and probably never will be, a properly functioning single European market in services, which is probably one of its greatest failures. Is not taking a flexible approach to services therefore eminently sensible?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for pointing out a fact that seems to have evaded a number of the Labour questioners today. Precisely because there is not that single services market in the European Union, it is right and in our interest that we take a flexible approach.

Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Two thirds of my constituents in Sleaford and North Hykeham voted for Brexit. Although they support getting on with the job of getting out of the EU, they look for reassurance on one aspect in particular of the proposed Chequers agreement, the common rulebook for goods and agri-food—agriculture and food being a large part of my constituency. Can the Prime Minister confirm what options will be open to us if we do not agree to any aspect of that rulebook? Who will be writing the rules in the future?

The Prime Minister: It is important that it will be open to Parliament to make decisions. If any rules change in the common rulebook, it will be for Parliament to determine whether or not it wishes to adopt those new rules. There will, of course, be a potential consequence, depending on the nature of any changes that are made, which is precisely why I say it will be Parliament that determines our laws in the future.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that these proposals go further than many of us, and indeed many voters, would like to see us go and are at the absolute limit of what many of us feel able to agree to. Will she reassure the House, and indeed the voters in my constituency, that when she presents this deal to the EU, she will make it absolutely clear that there is very little room for any further concessions and that rejection of this deal by the EU is likely to result in a no deal outcome?

The Prime Minister: As we look at this issue, I have been determined to ensure, as I said earlier, that we can protect jobs and livelihoods but also deliver on what people voted for, which is leaving the European Union and, crucially, the three issues of control of borders, money and laws. This proposal does, indeed, deliver on that, which is why the Government are putting it forward. We believe it is a good proposal, and I look forward to negotiating it with the European Union.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): It is easy to talk about Brexit, but the Prime Minister has to deliver it. Does she agree that the Chequers proposals balance securing jobs in vital sectors, such as Gloucestershire’s aviation supply chain, with delivering on the promise of an enterprising and independent trade policy?

The Prime Minister: Of course there are many theories about Brexit and the type of Brexit we should have, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right that what we are
Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): Can my right hon. Friend assure our European and international partners that she and her Cabinet colleagues have the overwhelming support of the majority of the party, of this House and of the people of this country in moving forward in the way the White Paper will suggest?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his patience. It is important that we now move forward together as one country, very clear in what we want to see in our future relationship with the European Union, and that we go into the negotiations with that confidence.

Mr Speaker: I am most grateful to the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and all 95 Back Benchers who questioned the Prime Minister. Whatever people think about this matter, the Prime Minister has clearly scored highly today in terms of productivity. We should be clear about that.

Amesbury Update

5.29 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement updating the House on recent developments in Salisbury and Amesbury. As I told the House last week, a major incident was declared in Wiltshire on Tuesday after two people were found unwell at a home in Amesbury. Both were taken to Salisbury District Hospital, where they were treated for exposure to a nerve agent of the type known as Novichok. This has been identified as the same type of nerve agent that contaminated both Yulia and Sergei Skripal.

It is with profound sadness that I must inform the House that one of the patients, Dawn Sturgess, died last night at Salisbury District Hospital. I know that the whole House will want to join me in expressing our sincere condolences to her family and friends. The police are working to ensure that her family have all the necessary support they need at this extremely difficult time. I know that the House will also want to join me in expressing our sincere thanks to the police, emergency services and staff at Salisbury District Hospital for their tireless professionalism and for the dedicated care they provided to Dawn Sturgess and continue to provide to Dawn’s partner, Charlie Rowley, who remains critically ill in hospital. I met some of the emergency workers at the weekend and I know just how hard they have worked and how committed they are to doing the best job possible. Hon. Members may also be aware that a police officer working on the investigation presented at Great Western Hospital and was later transferred to Salisbury District Hospital as a precautionary measure. I can report to the House that the police officer was not poisoned, did not require treatment and has since left hospital.

Dawn’s death only strengthens our resolve to find out exactly what happened and who is behind it. Earlier today, I chaired a Cobra meeting to discuss the next steps, and the Prime Minister and I will continue to receive regular updates on the situation. This is now a murder investigation, which is being led by about 100 detectives from counter-terrorism police command, alongside officers from Wiltshire police and other constabularies. We know that tests conducted at Porton Down have shown that both individuals were exposed to the same type of Novichok used to poison Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March. Officers are still trying to work out how the pair were exposed to the same nerve agent, although tests have confirmed that they touched a contaminated item with their hands. The investigation is now moving as quickly as possible to identify what the source of the contamination was.

Police officers have cordoned off a number of sites in Amesbury and Salisbury that they believe the two individuals visited in the period before they fell ill. This is a precautionary measure while the police continue to investigate how they came into contact with the substance. As I told the House last week, there is no evidence that either person visited any of the sites that were decontaminated following the attempted murders of Sergei and Yulia Skripal. We have taken a very robust approach to decontamination, and all sites reopened following the attempted murders in March are safe. Last week, the chief medical officer for England said that the risk to the wider public remains low but that...
people in the local area should not pick up any strange items such as needles, syringes or unusual containers, given that the source of the contamination has not yet been found. That advice remains unchanged. I have asked the Government’s Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies to ensure that the advice remains appropriate, in the light of the news overnight.

This is, of course, a very upsetting time, not just for Dawn’s family but for the people of Amesbury and Salisbury, who have seen the places they know and love cordoned off and become a murder investigation scene. I reassure them that we are doing everything we can to help to keep people safe. In addition, I have agreed with my colleagues that the Cabinet Office will work across Government Departments to develop a suitable support package for local businesses, some of which I met yesterday.

The murder investigation is ongoing and investigators are working urgently and around the clock. The work will take time and the investigation must be allowed to proceed on the evidence and the facts alone. I will keep the House and the public updated on any significant developments. I commend this statement to the House.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for making his statement to the House and for allowing me prior sight of it. I welcome the fact that he is doing his best to keep the House promptly updated on this very serious incident. The whole House appreciates that he chaired another Cobra meeting on this important issue this morning.

The first thing that must be said is that our deepest sympathies go out to the friends, family and loved ones of Dawn Sturgess. It was a horrific way to die. Opposition and Government Members can agree that it is of paramount importance that we establish exactly how it happened. I am sure the family and loved ones of Charlie Rowley must be deeply concerned at this time. We can at least offer them the reassurance that we are confident that the medical staff and medical specialists are doing everything that they can. We wish him a full recovery. I repeat the Opposition’s admiration of and support for the work of the emergency services, the NHS, the security services and the vital public servants at Porton Down.

The Home Secretary will be aware that there was some concern among some people in Salisbury and Amesbury that they were not being given enough information. Ricky Rogers, a leading Wiltshire councillor, said that the death of Sturgess had “heightened tension”. He went on:

“Local residents have never been told enough about the first incident back in March. I think someone from counter-terrorism needs to come here and tell us what they know”.

However, since he said that, the Metropolitan police counter-terrorism chief Neil Basu has made a very full public statement, which may have allayed some concerns. The Opposition appreciate that the security services cannot reveal everything they know as soon as they know it, but will the Home Secretary give an assurance that local people will be kept as fully informed as is feasible?

I welcome the Home Secretary’s announcement of work on a support package for local business, which I asked about last week. We will wait to hear further detail. It has been a terrible period for the community. Public concern after the first incident, and now this second poisoning incident, represents a blow to business and retail in the area. Local businesses were only just recovering from the fallout from the original incident, so we welcome news about a support package.

Going forward, after these very serious security incidents, the most important thing is that we limit speculation and guesswork and have the most thorough investigation that goes where the evidence takes it. The sad death of Dawn Sturgess deserves no less.

Sajid Javid: I thank the right hon. Lady for her comments. I join her in expressing our thoughts for the family and friends of Dawn Sturgess, who will of course be going through an incredibly difficult time. She was right to start with those remarks and to remind us all that Charlie Rowley is still gravely ill in hospital. The thoughts of the whole House—of all of us present today—remain with him. We wish nothing less than a speedy recovery for him.

As she did last week, the right hon. Lady quite rightly took the opportunity to commend the work of the emergency services. As I mentioned, I went to Amesbury this weekend and met emergency workers from the local police, health and fire services, and took the opportunity to thank them for everything they have done and continue to do, both in response to the original incident and, of course, now. In their approach to the work and how they have done it, they continue to help local people and to build confidence, so the right hon. Lady was right to mention them.

The right hon. Lady mentioned that she has heard people ask in some quarters whether more information could be made available, especially relating to the original incident in March. That desire for more information, especially from local people, is perfectly understandable, but, as she herself appreciated this is a live, ongoing police investigation, and what the police can share with the public is always limited. That is understandable, but as she noted, and I thank her for that, the head of counter terrorism policing, Mr Neil Basu, has now made a further statement, which touches on both the original investigation and this current incident. I have every reason to believe that he is sharing whatever information he possibly can with the public, but it is right that the information that is shared is a decision made by the police, and by the police alone. If it would be helpful to the right hon. Lady, I would happily arrange a further briefing on Privy Council terms with perhaps the deputy national security adviser. In that way, she could get a bit more information. If she wants to take that up, I think that she would find it helpful, and that offer is available to her.

The right hon. Lady also talked about the support package. I share her concerns there. She will know from the original incident that a support package was put together by central Government working with the local council, Wiltshire Council, and that a number of businesses have received support. Given this new incident and the impact that that can have locally on businesses, and given the meetings that I have had with some of those businesses, it is important that we look at that again and
see what further support can be provided. At today’s Cobra meeting, I felt that it should be cross-Government support, taking in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as well as the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Treasury. They should all be involved and working together. That is why the Cabinet Office offered to co-ordinate that activity, and it is working on that as we speak. The local Member of Parliament, my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (John Glen), who joins me on the Front Bench, has been very involved, coming up with some helpful suggestions for local businesses, so we will certainly be following up on those, too.

The right hon. Lady said that speculation should be limited. I do not think that speculation will add in any way to what local people and the country at large want to see. As she quite rightly said, people want to be led by the evidence, the full facts, which is why we must all allow the police to do their work. Whenever I have any further information that I can share publicly, I will, of course, come to the House to do so. As I have just said, if it is information that cannot be made public, I am happy to make sure that she gets updates on Privy Council terms. I very much welcome her approach to this, because it is exactly what the country wants to see.

**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): Given that, exactly 12 years ago, the Russian Federation Council passed a law permitting the extra-judicial killing of opponents overseas, is it not rather strange that Sergei Skripal was living in plain sight in Salisbury? Can the Home Secretary assure the House that those other defectors, such as Oleg Gordievsky, who has been sentenced to death in absentia, and Victor Makarov are having their security arrangements suitably reviewed and any protection that they require afforded to them?

**Sajid Javid:** I am very happy to assure my right hon. Friend that, clearly, there were lessons to be learned from the original incident, and that, no doubt, there will be in due course from this new incident. I know that the security services and the police have drawn lessons from the action on 4 March, and part of that is making sure that all people in Britain, whether they are British citizens or others, have the level of protection that is necessary.

**Joanna Cherry** (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I thank the Home Secretary both for his statement and for the courtesy of giving me advance sight of it. This is first and foremost a personal tragedy for the deceased and her family and friends, and I wish to express condolences to them on behalf of the Scottish National party. We are also very conscious that Mr Rowley is still seriously ill in hospital, and that this must be a particularly stressful time for his family and friends; we very much hope that he will make a full recovery. Like others, I wish to acknowledge the emergency services, particularly the NHS staff, for their swift, professional and brave response to these incidents.

It is very concerning that a citizen of these islands has died here as a result of contact with a nerve agent that we understand originates from Russia. But this is now a murder inquiry and justice must be allowed to take its course. In the meantime, I have two questions for the Home Secretary, the answers to which should not prejudice ongoing investigations as to culpability. First, local people will understandably be very alarmed, and our hearts go out to them. Will he tell us how wide an area is now being decontaminated, and when can local people be assured that the wider clean-up operation has been completed?

Secondly, last Thursday the Home Secretary was unable to confirm whether the Novichok used in this instance can be attributed to the same batch as was used in the attack on the Skripals. Will he confirm today whether it will be possible to establish that from testing, and if so, when that information might be available?

**Sajid Javid:** The hon. and learned Lady is right to send her condolences and thoughts to the family of Dawn Sturgess, and to send her best wishes to Charlie Rowley. As she said, the situation is concerning to people in this House and across the country, but especially to local people. However, she has rightly identified that, as the investigation is ongoing, there are a number of things that probably cannot be shared at this point.

The hon. and learned Lady asked two specific questions, the first of which was about decontamination. I assume that she was referring to the original incident. A number of sites relating to the original incident were cordoned off. Once the police had finished their investigation of these sites, they were made available to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and experts for decontamination. Not all the sites from the original incident have been fully decontaminated. Those that have been decontaminated have of course been opened up and are safe, but some sites are still going through the decontamination process.

As for the new incident, a number of sites have been cordoned off and are being used for live police investigation. The decontamination will not begin until the police investigations are complete. Once the police are ready they will of course hand the sites over for decontamination, but the police work will take priority and the sites will be cordoned off. It is worth mentioning that all the sites will be protected. We would not want someone to enter them even accidentally—not just from a policing perspective, but of course because they have not been decontaminated, or the decision has not been made—so they are guarded at all times.

The hon. and learned Lady also asked about the batch. She is right to remind the House that the nerve agent used in the latest incident is the same as that used in the incident on 4 March, but the scientists have not been able to identify, or even determine whether it is from the same batch. It may well be, but that is not known at this point. That is partly due to the sample that the scientists at Porton Down have at this point. From this incident, they have blood samples from the two individuals who were contaminated, and these samples are not strong enough to match to a batch. That might well be possible if further evidence is available later in the investigation.

**Dr Matthew Offord** (Hendon) (Con): May I provide some reassurance to the Home Secretary and the shadow Home Secretary? I have known Assistant Commissioner Basu since his time as borough commander in Barnet, and he is an excellent police officer. No doubt he will be thorough in his investigation and certainly very professional. Will the Home Secretary provide me with some reassurance that Assistant Commissioner Basu has the necessary resources, because he really is looking for a needle in a haystack? The second contamination occurred some distance from the first, so he has a very large area to cover.
Sajid Javid: I thank my hon. Friend for expressing his confidence in Neil Basu, who has been leading both investigations, into the original incident and in this case. He has also excelled himself in his response to some of the terrorist attacks that, sadly, the country has seen.

My hon. Friend asks me particularly about resources. I would like to assure him on that. One of the reasons I went to speak to the chief constable locally, and have spoken to counter-terrorism police both last week and today, was to assure myself on that point. I remind my hon. Friend that as well as the more than 100 counter-terrorism police officers there locally at the moment, there is support from Wiltshire police in their work and other constabularies are also involved through a mutual aid process. When the second incident occurred, Wiltshire police requested support from military police as well, to help guard some of the sites. That military police support was on the ground within 48 hours. I believe that at this point there is enough support, but we will keep that under review, and if more support is needed, we will of course make it available.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I thank the Home Secretary for his update on the murder investigation into this vile use of a chemical weapon on British soil. I join him and the shadow Home Secretary in sending our condolences to Dawn Sturgess’s family and our thoughts to Charlie Rowley.

May I ask the Home Secretary further about how the Home Office and the counter-terrorism police are working together to ensure not only that this investigation rightly and our thoughts to Charlie Rowley.

The right hon. Lady will also know that resources for counter-terrorism policing were increased, and increased substantially, following the five terrorist attacks of last year. We constantly keep that under review to make sure that the resources are there, given the priority for this type of policing. In response to this incident, counter-terrorism police are drawing a lot of support from Wiltshire police and the other constabularies, and from the presence of military police, because that allows them to focus on what they specialise in. They are all working very closely together. We will keep that under review and keep working with them, and if extra support is required, we will certainly be making that available.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): One of the striking things about the Skripal attack was the concerted campaign of misinformation with which we were attacked in this country. Will the Home Secretary talk a little bit about what the Government will do to work with international partners to make sure that people in this country know as many of the facts as possible and are in the best possible position to judge correctly the misinformation campaign that will inevitably follow?

Sajid Javid: My hon. Friend rightly reminds this House about the Kremlin’s persistent and constant use of disinformation against those it perceives as its enemies. After the original attack, the Kremlin did that time and again. There were over 25 disinformation narratives in response to the March attack. Sadly, with regard to the Amesbury poisonings, the Kremlin has already established some 12 false narratives. It specialises in false information. This is an opportunity to remind Members that in initiating work with Russian television, radio and other outlets, the only job that they are doing is helping the Kremlin to feed poison to the rest of the world.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): On the Russians feeding poison to the rest of the world, is it still the Government’s working assumption that the only credible explanation for what happened earlier this year was that the Russian state was directly involved in ordering the poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal? If that is the case, is not the most likely explanation still that the Russians have been so careless about the way in which Novichoks have been used in the United Kingdom that this murder lies at the door of the Kremlin?

Sajid Javid: It is absolutely still the Government’s view that there is no other plausible explanation than that the Kremlin was responsible for the attack on Yulia and Sergei Skripal on 4 March. With this latest incident, we must be led by the evidence and see what the facts are as the police continue their investigation, but frankly it is hard to see that there is any other plausible explanation.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): I echo my right hon. Friend’s gratitude to Wiltshire’s emergency services and staff at Salisbury District Hospital. Will he ensure that they have available all the information, support and resources they need to continue to do their job?

Sajid Javid: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. With this new incident, having the first Cobra meeting helped a lot in making sure not only that the right amount of resources were made available but that they are being used in the best way and have the biggest impact. We will constantly keep that under review. We are ensuring that, whether for the police work or working with the local authorities and others, the resources that they need will be there.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): May I associate myself and my party with what has been said about the tragic death of Dawn Sturgess? It was needless, it was undeserved, and, to be honest, it seems chillingly sinister that a death like that can happen in our country in this day and age.

I accept the argument that the Russian state was probably associated with the attack earlier in the year. The Home Secretary is correct to say that we should not jump to any conclusions while the investigation is carried out. With regard to the earlier question about involvement on the international scene in trying to work out what happened, has he applied pressure to his counterparts
in the Russian state—perhaps not with any sign of success—to see whether it would be forthcoming with intelligence about the agent and, more importantly, its possible cure?

Sajid Javid: The hon. Gentleman reminds the House of the nature of the original attack, about which we do have far more information and facts. It reminds the House of just how barbaric and inhumane that was: the use of a nerve agent—a chemical weapon—for the first time in Europe since the second world war; an act carried out by the Russian Government. That is the view not just of the British Government but of 23 of our allies across the world. As a result, we saw the action that they all took, united with us, to expel diplomats.

With regard to this incident, again, we do not want to jump to conclusions. We want to see what the facts bring out. The hon. Gentleman asked whether any type of help has been forthcoming from the Russians. The only thing forthcoming from the Russians is a disinformation campaign.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the proceedings on the Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill:

**Timetable**

1. (a) Proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be taken at today's sitting in accordance with this Order.
   (b) Notices of Amendments, new Clauses or new Schedules to be moved in Committee of the whole House may be accepted by the Clerks at the Table before the Bill has been read a second time.
   (c) Proceedings on Second Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) four hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.
   (d) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and proceedings up to and including Third Reading shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) six hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion for this Order.

**Timing of proceedings and Questions to be put**

2. When the Bill has been read a second time:

   (a) it shall, despite Standing Order No. 63 (Committal of bills not subject to a programme order), stand committed to a Committee of the whole House without any Question being put;
   (b) the Speaker shall leave the Chair whether or not notice of an Instruction has been given.

3. (a) On the conclusion of proceedings in Committee of the whole House, the Chairman shall report the Bill to the House without putting any Question.
   (b) If the Bill is reported with amendments, the House shall proceed to consider the Bill as amended without any Question being put.

4. (a) and any proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, a legislative grand committee withholds consent to the Bill or any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill, the House shall proceed to Reconsideration of the Bill without any Question being put.
   (b) If, following proceedings in Committee of the whole House and any proceedings on Consideration of the Bill, a legislative grand committee withholds consent to the Bill or any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill, the House shall proceed to Reconsideration of the Bill without any Question being put.
   (c) If, following Reconsideration of the Bill—
      (a) a legislative grand committee withholds consent to any Clause or Schedule of the Bill or any amendment made to the Bill (but does not withhold consent to the whole Bill), and
      (b) a Minister of the Crown indicates his or her intention to move a minor or technical amendment to the Bill, the House shall proceed to consequential Consideration of the Bill without any Question being put.

6. For the purpose of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (1), the Chairman or Speaker shall forthwith put the following Questions in the same order as they would fall to be put if this Order did not apply—

   (a) any Question already proposed from the Chair;
   (b) any Question necessary to bring to a decision a Question so proposed;
   (c) the Question on any amendment moved or Motion made by a Minister of the Crown;
   (d) any other Question necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded; and shall not put any other questions, other than the question on any motion described in paragraph (17)(a) of this Order.

7. On a Motion so made for a new Clause or a new Schedule, the Chairman or Speaker shall put only the Question that the Clause or Schedule be added to the Bill.

8. If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (6)(c) on successive amendments moved or Motions made by a Minister of the Crown, the Chairman or Speaker shall instead put a single Question in relation to those amendments or Motions.
(9) If two or more Questions would fall to be put under paragraph (6)(d) in relation to successive provisions of the Bill, the Chairman shall instead put a single Question in relation to those provisions, except that the Question shall be put separately on any Clause of or Schedule to the Bill which a Minister of the Crown has signified an intention to leave out.

Consideration of Lords Amendments

(10) (a) Any Lords Amendments to the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(11) Paragraphs (2) to (11) of Standing Order No. 83F (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (10) of this Order.

Subsequent stages

(12) (a) Any further Message from the Lords on the Bill may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(b) Proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (a) shall thereupon be resumed.

(13) Paragraphs (2) to (9) of Standing Order No. 83G (Programme orders: conclusion of proceedings on further messages from the Lords) apply for the purposes of bringing any proceedings to a conclusion in accordance with paragraph (12) of this Order.

Reasons Committee

(14) Paragraphs (2) to (6) of Standing Order No. 83H (Programme orders: reasons committee) apply in relation to any committee to be appointed to draw up reasons after proceedings have been brought to a conclusion in accordance with this Order.

Miscellaneous

(15) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply so far as necessary for the purposes of this Order.

(16) Standing Order No. 82 (Business Committee) shall not apply in relation to any proceedings to which this Order applies.

(17) (a) No Motion shall be made, except by a Minister of the Crown, to alter the order in which any proceedings on the Bill are taken, to recommit the Bill or to vary or supplement the provisions of this Order.

(b) No notice shall be required of such a Motion.

(c) Such a motion may be considered forthwith without any Question being put; and any proceedings interrupted for that purpose shall be suspended accordingly.

(d) The Question on such a Motion shall be put forthwith; and any proceedings suspended under sub-paragraph (c) shall thereupon be resumed.

(e) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to proceedings on such a Motion.

(18) (a) No dilatory Motion shall be made in relation to proceedings to which this Order applies except by a Minister of the Crown.

(b) The Question on any such Motion shall be put forthwith.

(19) No debate shall be held in accordance with Standing Order No. 24 (Emergency debates) at today’s sitting after this Order has been agreed.

(20) Proceedings to which this Order applies shall not be interrupted under any Standing Order relating to the sittings of the House.

(21) (a) Any private business which has been set down for consideration at a time falling after the commencement of proceedings on this Order or on the Bill on a day on which the Bill has been set down to be taken as an Order of the Day shall, instead of being considered as provided by Standing Orders or by any Order of the House, be considered at the conclusion of the proceedings on the Bill on that day.

(b) Standing Order No. 15(1) (Exempted business) shall apply to the private business so far as necessary for the purpose of securing that the business may be considered for a period of three hours.—(Karen Bradley.)
Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill
Second Reading

5.59 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Government have been working intensely to restore devolved government in Northern Ireland since the collapse of the Executive last year. It is deeply regrettable that, despite efforts, the political parties in Northern Ireland have not yet reached an agreement that would enable devolved government. In the absence of an Executive, the Northern Ireland civil service has worked, and continues to work, with the utmost professionalism and commitment to protect and preserve public services in the interests of all communities in Northern Ireland. I commend their efforts.

Many hon. and right hon. Members will have seen the ruling from the High Court last week regarding the Buick judgment. I want to reassure all Members that the Government have noted that ruling and are considering it carefully. As our track record shows, in the absence of an Executive, the Government have already taken, and are committed to take, a number of limited but necessary steps to ensure good governance and to protect the delivery of public services in Northern Ireland. That included providing certainty for Northern Ireland finances with my budget statement to Parliament on 8 March.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Secretary of State has quite rightly made reference to a very significant judgment last week in relation to the incinerator in County Antrim. Will she indicate whether the Government intend to appeal that decision yet again?

Karen Bradley: We are considering the position. The judgment was received at 9.30 am on Friday. There has been a little bit going on over the weekend, but we are working very hard on that, and we will ensure that we come to the House with our conclusions and decisions. That decision was not the one that we wanted, and we will obviously consider our position.

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State is considering the judgment, which deals with a big decision made by a permanent secretary—a civil servant. However, that situation does not accurately reflect the fact that hundreds of decisions across all the Departments are not being made, and cannot be made unless there is a Minister in charge to make them.

Karen Bradley: We need to consider the exact implications of the judgment that we received on Friday. When we have reached our conclusion, I will of course come to the Chamber, when I will be happy to debate it with the hon. Lady, who I know has a particular interest in and knowledge of that issue.

The budget statement that I made to Parliament on 8 March set out headline departmental allocations for the 2018-19 financial year, helping to safeguard Northern Ireland finances by enabling the Northern Ireland civil service to manage and maintain public services throughout the early months of this financial year. This budget Bill seeks to build on that certainty.

As I advised the House on 20 March, the budget position and the vote on account provision approved by Parliament in the Northern Ireland Budget (Anticipation and Adjustments) Act 2018, which provides authority to the NICS to access up to 45% of the previous year’s allocations to allow day-to-day spending in the early months of this financial year, was the first step in the budget-setting process. Further legislation is now required to put that budget position on a legal footing and to provide the legal authority for the NICS to access the full level of funding available for the whole financial year. Without the Bill, the only way for Departments to access cash is for the NICS to make use of emergency powers under section 59 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, although those powers, too, are limited.

Lady Hermon: The Secretary of State is being very generous by allowing me to intervene once again. She will be well aware that the Prime Minister has just completed a lengthy statement to the House on Brexit and what the then Cabinet agreed on Friday. I was particularly struck by the fact that the Prime Minister indicated that the preparations for a no-deal scenario would be intensified—"stepped up", to use her words. In those circumstances, will the Secretary of State confirm that the Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland will have the resources he needs, including additional police officers, to deal with the policing implications of a no-deal scenario?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady is nothing if not persistent. She quizzed me extensively about that matter at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on Wednesday. As I said to her then, we have received the Chief Constable’s recommendations and are considering them across Government. She is right to say that we are stepping up no-deal planning, as the Prime Minister stated. It is also worth saying that the deal agreed by the Cabinet at Chequers is one that works for the whole United Kingdom. It is very important, from a Union point of view, that we have a deal with the European Union that ensures that our red lines for Northern Ireland of no hard border on the island of Ireland and no border on the Irish sea are adhered to.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): Is the Secretary of State confirming effectively to the House that the financial shortfall identified by the Chief Constable will now be met by additional resources, as required by the Chief Constable when he met the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee?

Karen Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is also persistent in his questioning. As I said last Wednesday in front of the Select Committee, we have received the Chief Constable’s report and are looking at it.

The emergency powers under section 59 of the 1998 Act are intended to be used only in the absence of more orthodox legal authority. I do not consider those emergency powers to be appropriate for managing Northern Ireland finances for a second financial year.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): Before the Secretary of State leaves the issue of security and preparations for a no-deal exit from the European Union, I am sure she will remember that at the meeting in Downing Street with the Prime Minister and herself, the leader of my
party and I presented to the Prime Minister directly information supplied by the Chief Constable of the PSNI on the issue of extra resources. As well as dealing with the issues that have rightly and properly been raised at the Select Committee, it is important that she recognises that the Prime Minister herself made a commitment to look very carefully at that issue, and we expect an early answer on it.

Karen Bradley: For clarification, the report I am referring to is precisely the one presented to the Prime Minister by the right hon. Gentleman and the leader of the Democratic Unionist party. We have received it and are considering it across Government, as we rightly should in that situation.

This Bill seeks to put the budget position I set out in March on a legal footing. It does not direct the NICS Departments on how to get these allocations. In the absence of an Executive, it remains for Northern Ireland Departments to implement their budget positions. How Northern Ireland Departments will allocate their budgets is set out in the detailed NI main estimates Command Paper. Passing this budget Bill does not remove the pressing need to have locally accountable political leaders in place to take the fundamental decisions that will secure a more sustainable future for the people of Northern Ireland.

I will now turn to the Bill itself. The Bill authorises Northern Ireland Departments and certain other bodies to incur expenditure of up to £8.9 billion and use resources totalling up to £9.9 billion for the financial year ending on 31 March 2019. While this is a technical budget Bill, I do not dismiss the constitutional significance of Parliament having to deliver this for Northern Ireland. I therefore draw Members’ attention to two important issues that do not form a part of the Bill expressly, but will be of interest to Parliament as we debate the Bill. First, as I highlighted in my March statement, this budget includes a further £410 million of UK Government funding that flows from the confidence and supply agreement. That is in addition to the £20 million already released in 2017-18 to help to address immediate pressures in health and education.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): On the back of the court judgment that was reinforced last week, which has made it virtually impossible for NI civil servants and permanent secretaries to move forward and even to spend the money that they will have, we fear that the confidence and supply money will not be allocated or used correctly if the government direction is pushed onto them. The only people who can do it are this Government here, because there is no Executive in Northern Ireland to deal with it.

Karen Bradley: As I made clear in my earlier remarks, we are very aware of the Buick judgment and are considering that decision. In respect of specific items of spending allocated from the confidence and supply money, we are looking carefully to ensure that if ministerial decisions are required, we know what decisions are required and how we would go about taking them. To be clear, there is no difficulty in spending the money that has been allocated so far. As and when there becomes a difficulty, we will of course be ready to take actions as necessary.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): On that point, may I appeal to the Secretary of State, particularly in relation to education? I know from talking to schools in my constituency that the additional funding that we envisaged would go to the frontline and the chalk face—to the schools—is not seeing its way through. It is being used to plug gaps in the Education Authority’s budget, not in schools’ budgets. This is something we feel it is very important for the Secretary of State to examine and to press home.

Karen Bradley: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we examine all such points. If he wishes to write to me specifically on the instances he has learned about, I will be more than happy to have officials in my Department speak to those in the NICS to establish what has happened. We are very clear where the money needs to be spent. It was agreed in the confidence and supply arrangement, and we are taking the steps that we need to take to ensure the money is spent as intended.

I want to be very clear that this Bill is not legislating for the £410 million. That was approved by Parliament for release as part of the UK Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) (No. 2) Bill, while this Bill gives the NICS the authority to allocate that funding. More detail on funding allocations is contained in the supporting Command Paper. Just to be clear, we are following on from the estimates process on which we voted in the Chamber last week. On Tuesday evening, we voted to make sure that the Northern Ireland block grant was properly allocated. Today, we are in effect carrying out the estimates process that would normally be done at Stormont. In the absence of Stormont, we are dealing with this through primary legislation here.

Ian Paisley: I appreciate what the Secretary of State is saying, and yes, by and large, that is exactly what is happening, but it is not quite as benign as that. The Secretary of State has personally signed off a change in the budget by which £100 million has been taken from capital spend to revenue spend. Civil servants are of course very delighted about that, because some of it will go towards redundancy packages for them, but that is not the point. The Secretary of State has taken the decision on advice, so why does she not take the other decisions that are necessary to make Northern Ireland function?

Karen Bradley: I said that the hon. Gentleman was persistent. The decision to allocate spending from the capital budget to the revenue budget was taken to make sure that the budget balanced. It was taken after consultation with all the main parties in Northern Ireland, which all understood that that decision was taken to ensure that the budget balanced and that additional revenue raising from the people of Northern Ireland was not required.

Let me turn to the second important issue to which I would like to draw the attention of the House. As well as placing all Northern Ireland Audit Office audits and additional revenue raising from the people of Northern Ireland was not required.
Ireland today. We thought that we had turned our back on their responsibilities for political stability and good governance in the United Kingdom. On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I am sorry to intervene in these sensible discussions, but the Secretary of State has been very generous in taking interventions. Surely one way in which the budgets could be balanced—this would be better and might provide a bit of impetus—would be if the salaries of those in the Assembly who are not doing their jobs were suspended. Perhaps we would get a little bit of movement, and we might have some spare money for the Department of Education.

Karen Bradley: That point has been raised with me on a number of occasions. My right hon. Friend will know that I legislated to stop the increase in salaries that would have happened automatically on 1 April, and we are considering the position with regard to ongoing salaries. I know that he will be surprised, but I am afraid that even cutting Northern Ireland Assembly pay would not quite reach the figure of £100 million that we needed to reallocate from capital to revenue.

Nigel Dodds: I am sure the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) will be very interested to hear the much more substantial amounts that would be saved if we cut payments to Members who do not take their seats in this House. Since 2005–06, £1,023,334 has been paid to date in representative or equivalent Short money to Sinn Féin Members who do not take their seats, and they have got £4,165,000 in office costs and staffing allowances for not doing their jobs here. That has been tolerated by the Northern Ireland Office and by this House for a lot longer than there has been an issue of pay for Members of the Legislative Assembly. I am all for dealing with the issue of MLA pay, but let us deal with Sinn Féin issues as well.

Karen Bradley: I have to say that this is not a matter for which the Northern Ireland Office has responsibility, as the right hon. Gentleman knows. This is a matter for the House, because those allowances are paid from the House. I encourage all right hon. and hon. Members who feel strongly about that matter to take it up with the House authorities.

The UK Government remain absolutely committed to providing Northern Ireland with good governance and stability while we continue our efforts to restore devolved government at the earliest possible time. The people of Northern Ireland deserve strong political leadership from a locally elected and accountable devolved Government, and that remains my firm priority. In its absence, however, the UK Government will always deliver on their responsibilities for political stability and good governance in the United Kingdom. On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

6.15 pm

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): May I begin—I think the whole House will be united on this at least—by condemning the sectarian violence over the weekend in Derry/Londonderry? This has no place in Northern Ireland today. We thought that we had turned our back on that kind of activity.

Let me make it clear from the outset that, although the process of delivering this budget legislation is perhaps an extraordinary one, we certainly do not intend to stand in its way, but we have to raise questions about the nature of the legislation. There is no doubt that bringing forward this budget is a political decision, and it needs to be made crystal clear—I hope both the Secretary of State and the Minister in replying will do so—that this is not part of creeping direct rule. It is important that we establish the point that this is not part of creeping direct rule.

This is a truncated debate and scrutiny is, by its nature, limited. Were we to do the budgetary process for the United Kingdom in this way, the House would quite rightly be incensed. I accept the Secretary of State’s comment that this is almost the last possible time such a budget can be delivered and that it is time-sensitive. However, in that context, the Secretary of State has already referred to consulting the various parties, and the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) has raised a decision that the Secretary of State has made. It is important to record how that consultation took place. In particular, at what point did she consult all the five major political parties—the Assembly parties—because that is an important test of the legitimacy of the decisions within the budget?

Karen Bradley: I am very happy to put that on the record, but I also join the hon. Gentleman in his comments about the violence we saw at the weekend in Derry/Londonderry. I confirm that unusually—I would not normally do this in relation to any legislation or statements in the House—I made sure that all the main parties in Northern Ireland saw the budget proposals before they were finalised, and they were not presented to the House until all five parties had seen them.

Tony Lloyd: I am grateful for that clarification, although I may return to that point later in a different context.

Nevertheless, there is still a question of accountability. In the end, accountability is a function of adequate scrutiny—not simply of the budgetary process at this stage, but of the spending that takes place afterwards. I ask both the Secretary of State and the Minister to consider very closely what the role can now be of the Northern Ireland Audit Office. It is one of the few bodies that has legitimacy, but its legitimacy is itself challenged by the lack of a functioning Executive and Northern Ireland Assembly. However, the Audit Office is certainly one of the few bodies that can put information into the public domain and exercise some stewardship of the spending that takes place and value for money, which is so important in any form of Government spending.

Real questions must also be asked about the way in which decisions are made on spending more generally as the political logjam in Northern Ireland—the lack of a power-sharing Assembly—quite frankly turns such decisions bit by bit into some areas of enormous difficulty and some areas of crisis. The hon. Members for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) and for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) have made points about the recent decision concerning the Mallusk incinerator. The Secretary of State herself mentioned the situation, which has now been through the High Court and the Court of Appeal. I must say to her that I accept people were busy on Friday, but considerable work should already have been done on this because it is important to have legal certainty.
Karen Bradley: I apologise if I was flippant in my remarks regarding the weekend. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we did significant work in advance of the judgment. We need to spend time looking carefully at what was said in the hearing and the judgment so that we can ensure that we react appropriately. Of course, I will discuss that with him before any final decisions are taken.

Tony Lloyd: I am grateful to the Secretary of State, but there is a difficult question about the capacity of the Northern Ireland civil service to make decisions. The Court ruled in the case of a controversial planning decision that is no longer deemed to be legitimate unless there is a further appeal by whomsoever, but this goes way beyond that case, as Northern Ireland Members have said. We need certainty about how money can be spent, what budgetary headings in the Bill can be transformed into practical decisions and whether the civil service has the capacity to make those decisions.

This is not an abstract, theoretical game. It will be a day-to-day game with the possibility of judicial review taking place on any and every occasion. We need certainty. In the mini-budget in March, the Secretary of State talked about seeking legal advice on how the money can be spent, but we need early certainty on the public record so that civil servants know what their capacity is. Beyond civil servants, we need certainty so that the people of Northern Ireland know how their money can be spent, because difficult and time-sensitive issues are looming.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) has mentioned the north-south connector on many occasions. The decision in principle has already been taken, so in one sense that ought to be a relatively easy decision, but providing the moneys to make the connector work requires decision making by individuals or a structure that cannot subsequently be challenged in the courts. That is enormously important.

I join the hon. Members for North Down (Lady Hermon) and for North Antrim and the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) in their challenge to the Secretary of State on the role of the PSNI. All other things being equal, our country will leave the European Union on 29 March. In her statement earlier, the Prime Minister said that a range of possibilities were being considered, including a no deal outcome. The PSNI Chief Constable has made it clear that that no deal outcome would require further staffing—a serious increase in numbers. I can assure the Secretary of State that that is time-sensitive because it is not possible, even between now and the end of March, to recruit and train 300 new members of the PSNI. It is important to recognise that. It is time-sensitive and, actually, the time is already long overdue.

Ian Paisley: I appreciate what the shadow Secretary of State has put on the record. It is important in terms of the lack of numbers. Under the Patten recommendation, police are down by 1,000, which needs to be rectified. He is right that it will take time. What worries me most—I hope that he agrees—is that, in the top team of the PSNI, six of the nine senior officers are currently on temporary contracts because the Policing Board is not functioning. That needs to be solved immediately for the good governance of policing in Northern Ireland.

Tony Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. That is one of many issues that will be frozen for as long as no Executive sits.

I can tell the House of my own experience of being a part of recruiting police officers. Recruitment and training matters enormously. The confidence of the Northern Ireland public in the PSNI demands highly and thoroughly trained people coming into the service. It is in that context that the views of the Chief Constable must be taken into account. The Secretary of State must do better than simply saying that it is under consideration. We need decisions, and we need them fast.

Lady Hermon: The shadow Secretary of State will be aware that actions speak louder than words. He rightly acknowledges the needs of the PSNI Chief Constable, who made it clear to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee two weeks ago this Wednesday that he needed additional police officers and resources. The hon. Gentleman has colleagues on the Committee. Did he and his party leader take action and write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland reflecting and supporting the needs and views of the Chief Constable in his request for additional resources? I do not want just to hear words; I want to know that the Labour party took follow-up actions.

Tony Lloyd: The hon. Lady’s comments are very helpful. Better than writing, we raised the matter in Northern Ireland questions. I challenged the Secretary of State—I challenge her again today—to recognise the strength of the Chief Constable’s words and demands and to follow words with legitimate action, as the hon. Lady says. That is the right way forward.

We need Government action on a number of other issues raised in the mini-budget debate in March, including the follow-up to the Hart inquiry. The question of historical institutional abuse will not go away, except, sadly, as victims begin to disappear. It cannot be right that victims whose lives were made massively more difficult, and sometimes nearly impossible, have to wait year after year to find resolution to historical abuse. It is important that there is a clear timetable for consultation. I understand the limitations for the civil service, but given the time-sensitive nature of the inquiry for the victims, we need a clear path for the consultation process on the historical institutional abuse inquiry and the future of the Hart inquiry.

That leads me to the question of pensions for victims of the troubles, which is consistently raised. In fact, this is more straightforward for the Secretary of State in that I believe it is possible to fund it through the Westminster purse rather than through the Northern Ireland purse. One way or another, the amounts of money involved—£2 million to £3 million—would be well containable within any budget. Because of the time-sensitive nature of the question—people whose lives were made difficult are growing older and disappearing—we need firm action.

Karen Bradley: We have debated this matter a number of times in the House. I share the hon. Gentleman’s desire for a resolution, but he will know that the definition of victim has caused problems in terms of how anyone involved can assist them. I have asked the Victims’ Commissioner to do a piece of work on the definition of victim so that we can get to a resolution one way or another, which I am sure he will welcome.
Tony Lloyd: I welcome the Secretary of State’s words. Bringing this to a resolution is important, but as with all things, another round of consultation cannot be an excuse for inaction. It must be a driver so that we see justice in this difficult situation. Of course there are difficult decisions to be taken—I am aware of the different feelings that exist—but as often in such cases, grasping the nettle and saying that there is a way forward gives hope to the overwhelming majority of people who find themselves in that position. It is important that the House gives a clear signal that that can take place outwith Northern Ireland budgetary considerations.

In the same light, the Lord Chief Justice has made a request for a relatively short amount of money for the legacy inquest. Frankly, he has made it clear to me and to others that he would be able to deliver the outcome of the legacy inquests over the next five years if he is given the £5 million he has requested. If he is not given that money, it will take 30 years. Frankly, in 30 years’ time, consideration of the legacy inquest will be nearly irrelevant. Again, this issue is time-sensitive and it is within the Secretary of State’s capacity to begin to deliver on it.

As I said, we are beginning to move towards logjam. It may not yet be a crisis, but a crisis is beginning to emerge, even if only for individuals. We know that any major planning decisions will be scrutinised at the most sensitive level, but that anything controversial will be challenged in the courts. There are many other issues that need to be dealt with. The hon. Member for North Antrim referred to the inability to deliver permanent contracts for senior police officers in the PSNI. The same goes for the prisons ombudsman and many other similar positions.

In normal circumstances, health reform would apply to every constituency in every part of the United Kingdom. Bongino reported some time ago now that Northern Ireland has the longest waiting lists in the UK, so it is important that we have action on health reform to begin to deliver the healthcare the people of Northern Ireland want and need. This is a wake-up call to everyone to make sure that MLAs get back to work to deliver on that.

On school reform—the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) referred to the situation in schools—we know things that need to be done in the education system are being blocked because of the present constitutional impasse. One issue that is important to individuals is the mitigation of welfare payments. This was negotiated as a result of the Stormont House and Fresh Start processes and is slowly beginning to lapse. It will lapse completely, I think, in 2020, or perhaps a little later. Individuals are already beginning to fall foul of the fact that this has not been renewed. For individuals, this is now a crisis. Members of this House have made it clear that they would prefer issues such as equal marriage and the termination of pregnancies to be dealt with by the Northern Ireland Assembly, but in the end the pressure for action begins to grow on all sides.

As I said at the beginning of my remarks, any budget, even by inertia, contains de facto political decisions. I think that the nods of support from the Minister and the Secretary of State indicate that they accept this cannot be a signal towards direct rule. Warm words and aspirations are no longer enough. We need action.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, as we move towards the recess in the next couple of weeks, we really need the Secretary of State to ensure that the impasse does not further jeopardise the good governance of Northern Ireland? People are complaining and campaigning on the basis of, “Let’s get something done.” We need a package of measures in place, as soon as the House returns in early September, to alleviate the problems real people are facing and suffering on the ground.

Tony Lloyd: I hope that we see a groundswell of opinion in Northern Ireland that expects centre politicians—both here in Westminster and those elected to, but not sitting in, the Assembly—to get back to work. Many of the decisions that need to be made in the Assembly are important to the people on the ground, and they transcend the difference between the political parties. The issues faced in the past by John Hume, David Trimble, Dr Paisley and Martin McGuinness were massively bigger than the gap that now exists between the DUP and Sinn Féin. That is not just my opinion; I think that it would be the opinion of most ordinary folk in Northern Ireland. This is a wake-up call for everybody and a time for leadership.

Nigel Dodds: Of course we all share the hon. Gentleman’s desire to have the Assembly back as quickly as possible, but if he casts his mind back, he will recall that the last time we had a major issue and an impasse in getting the parties to agree was during the previous Labour Government. When Tony Blair and Gordon Brown were in charge, they took action to implement a form of interim decision making. Does he think they were right to do that?

Tony Lloyd: We need a package of action. It is incumbent on political leaders in Northern Ireland to stand up and be counted. Across the piece, politicians like the right hon. Gentleman have a leadership role in saying, “Get back to the Assembly.” There is, of course, a leadership role for the Secretary of State. I cannot rewrite history, by the way. What I would say is that we saw a move towards a successful conclusion and power sharing was reinvoked. We need movement towards the reintroduction of proper power sharing.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene again. When the Assembly was suspended in October 2002, under a Labour Government, the suspension provisions were on the statute book. They were repealed at the request, I understand, of Sinn Féin in the St Andrews agreement. Therefore, we are not comparing like with like. We are comparing a situation without a period of suspension of the Assembly, but with a grey area where the Assembly is simply not functioning but is not suspended.

Tony Lloyd: Constitutionally, the hon. Lady is absolutely right. I am not sure, however, that we will make progress by looking to the past. We have to look to the future. I applaud the Government’s decision to move to the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, which will meet in a couple of weeks’ time. It is important that it does so, and certainly my party will do everything it can to make the process work. It would be helpful to recognise a number of things. The conference is one of the institutions of the Good Friday agreement. It is part of
the framework of the agreement, which has not gone away. The two Governments, the Irish Government and the British Government, are co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement. I hope the Minister will make it clear, at a difficult time between our two nations—it is not simply a question of east-west relations, it is about ensuring progress on the north-south agenda too—that both Governments will show leadership in the expectation that it will be mirrored by leadership from the political parties in Northern Ireland.

It is time for a change. The things that are being held up cannot wait for finger pointing between political parties. The Secretary of State has to show real action in the weeks and months to come. Through the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, she can begin the process of bringing legitimate pressure to bear on all parties. We have to see real progress if we are to begin to deliver of bringing legitimate pressure to bear on all parties. The Secretary of State has to show real action cannot wait for finger pointing between political parties in Northern Ireland. The British Government, are co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement. I hope the Minister will make it clear, at a difficult time between our two nations—it is not simply a question of east-west relations, it is about ensuring progress on the north-south agenda too—that both Governments will show leadership in the expectation that it will be mirrored by leadership from the political parties in Northern Ireland.

6.38 pm

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): I would just like to make a few comments on Second Reading and then perhaps try to catch your eye in Committee, Mr Deputy Speaker.

First, I would just say to the Secretary of State that I was not indicating earlier that all the financial problems in Northern Ireland would be resolved if we did not pay Members of the Legislative Assembly for not attending. The point I was trying to make was similar to the point made by the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) in relation to Sinn Féin: people are being paid for something they are not doing, and I think that in a democracy that is fundamentally wrong. It is about not the capital but the enormous message it would send. The Secretary of State was quite dismissive at the Dispatch Box, but my point is actually very serious. That point has been addressed in previous times when the Assembly has gone down, and it needs to be looked at again. On the point about Sinn Féin Members being paid and not being present in the House, I know that they stand on that manifesto promise in elections, but I do not think that many people in this country—in these great islands of ours—would understand that situation.

I am a Member of Parliament for Hertfordshire, which needs more police and more funding for police—as a former Policing Minister, I understand that side of things a bit—but there is a difference in Northern Ireland. Policing in Northern Ireland is not like policing in any other part of this country. I have had the honour and privilege of being with NI police on patrol—in uniform as a young soldier and then as the Minister of State for Northern Ireland. We do not have armed police officers on the streets—doing community policing, every single one of them. Our police officers do not have pipe bombs thrown at them on a regular basis. In Northern Ireland, we had side-impact IEDs, threatening behaviour and people needing protection in their homes. Serving officers were moved from their homes, sometimes at a minute’s notice because of the threat against them. A lot of people from England, Scotland and Wales who are listening to this debate will say, “Why is an English MP standing up and asking the Secretary of State not just to look seriously at this, but to find some money for the Northern Ireland police force?” The answer is that it is different, because the police manage to keep a peace in Northern Ireland that the rest of the United Kingdom would not understand as peace. However, that peace in Northern Ireland is a million miles further forward than it has been before.

Previous Governments of both persuasions have found money for Northern Ireland for that reason—to keep the Good Friday agreement. My fear is this—it was my fear when I was in post in Northern Ireland, and many colleagues across the House will have had this fear—that we need momentum and we need to go forward, and stagnation takes us backwards. What we saw in the Bögside in Londonderry at the weekend is an example of stagnation and going back to the old days.

Mr Gregory Campbell: As the police try to move into a much more community-orient role in Northern Ireland, we all support that, but as we speak tonight, police officers in Northern Ireland are having to be deployed to the small enclave of the Fountain estate in Londonderry, where they are under constant attack from petrol bombs, acid bombs and stones. That is not the type of policing we ought to have, but it has to take place, and the police in Londonderry and the Chief Constable need the additional resources to cover that.

Sir Mike Penning: I completely agree. Knowing that part of the world as well as I do, and having meetings there as well as having been there many years ago, I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. But there is a problem: we have recruited a lot of police into the PSNI over recent years who have never seen this sort of terrorism and barbaric attacks on our officers, and it has come as a huge shock to them. I remember vividly the terribly sad event of David Black being murdered. I remember speaking to the young PSNI officers who were in and around the area in the aftermath, and they could not comprehend what they were seeing. I remember some of what was written while I was there as a Minister, and people were saying to me, “I didn’t join the force for this.”

We talk about recruitment. We would need 300 officers for a hard border, if it happened—chief constables always come up with figures for these things. We are short of officers now without any situation on the border, and we have to remember that 10,000 troops could not keep a hard border in Northern Ireland throughout the troubles. I have said before in the House that we can try as much as we want to have a hard border and it will not happen. We will have to use technology, and some of the best automatic number plate recognition is on that border now. There were no customs posts anywhere near the border, particularly in Monaghan and the areas of Middletown where I was. They were way up the road and actually were closed most of the time.

The point I am trying to make is that it is not just about recruiting numbers. They have to be the right people and they have to have explained to them very early on, before they sign on the dotted line and we commit money to training them, that policing in Northern Ireland is very different—they know because they live on the island. I consciously say “the island” because there are officers from the south. They live in the south and are very proud members of the PSNI.
Ian Paisley: The point that the right hon. Gentleman is making is compounded by the fact that each month, the Police Service of Northern Ireland loses 50 officers for the very reason that he identified. For a force the size of the PSNI, that loss is hugely significant, because we are not getting in the experienced officers we need with the skills to deal with the issues. Does he agree with the point that the Chief Constable made to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee earlier this month, which was that nationalists and nationalist leaders in Northern Ireland have to step up to the plate and encourage their community to join the police and to see it as a career for all the community?

Sir Mike Penning: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct. If we are going to have a community police force, and we created the PSNI for that reason—we abolished the RUC and created the PSNI—it has to be a force of all the people. For that reason, I completely agree that politicians on the nationalist side have to step up to the plate. Let us be honest about it: there are Catholics serving in the PSNI, but they are continually under threat.

Karen Bradley: I start by apologising to my right hon. Friend—I was not making light in any way of his comments about MLA pay. I know exactly the point that he was making. I also want to put on record my tribute to him as Policing Minister when we worked together in the Home Office. He understood policing in a way that very few Policing Ministers possibly can. I believe that he was Policing Minister when the National Crime Agency started to be able to operate in Northern Ireland, thanks to his work as the organised crime Minister.

Will my right hon. Friend join me in welcoming the news that assistant chief constable Drew Harris of the PSNI has been appointed as the next commissioner of the Garda in the Republic? That is excellent news, and it demonstrates the point that my right hon. Friend made earlier about the whole island of Ireland working together.

Sir Mike Penning: I thank the Secretary of State—I must have a moan more often if I get such nice comments. I know Drew really well, and a lot of colleagues in the House will know him well, too. It is a fantastic appointment, and he will do fantastic work for cross-border policing and community policing.

The Garda police very differently from the PSNI, and I have to respect them—there is a sovereign state. However, I was about to come on to the point that if we want to recruit the right sort of people more often, from the cross-border areas and cross-party, we must make sure we protect them. One thing that I hope the Secretary of State will raise with her opposite number is that the Garda do not put in place protection in the south for serving police officers from the Garda or from the north. That is a real concern, which was raised with me many times when I was a Minister. If people were coming from the south who needed protection, the only thing that we could do was take them out of the south and bring them into the north, which is obviously wrong. The Garda do not have the same policies as we do and do not support their officers in the same way. That is not criticism of them—they just do it differently—but perhaps the Secretary of State could raise that point with her opposite number.

I know that others want to speak, and I do not want to drag the debate out.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene at the end of his comments. Out of respect, including for the memory of my late husband, who was the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 10 years, I wonder if I might just ask the right hon. Gentleman to correct what he said earlier—that the Police Service of Northern Ireland took over after the RUC was abolished. The RUC was incorporated into the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many, many distinguished RUC officers still serve proudly in the PSNI.

Sir Mike Penning: If the hon. Lady had not asked me to correct the record, I would still have done so—I spoke inappropriately, and I apologise. I also pay tribute to her husband for the work that he did in getting us to where we are today. Sadly, he is no longer with us. I absolutely agree—I had ex-RUC officers in my own close protection when I was out there. Interestingly, I had former British soldiers who had fallen in love with Irish girls and stayed.

I just want to touch on the G8 summit at Lough Erne and the volunteers we had coming across from the mainland—from Great Britain. I remember Steve White of the Police Federation—he has left the federation now, but he is a good friend—telling me, “You will not get officers going over”. How wrong he was. Police officers from Scotland, Wales and England want to go and help their colleagues. I am still struck by what happened at the first briefing when I was there, when those green uniforms walked in and every other officer from around these great nations of ours stood up out of respect. It was not once; it happened again when I went to the Police Federation conference, simply because of the massive respect that other police forces have for the PSNI. As we know, quite a few of them get recruited out of the Province and into the other forces. Surely the sensible thing would be for them to go back and serve with the PSNI.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I rise, rather reluctantly, to speak in this debate.

We can all agree that, although it is sadly all too necessary, this budget debate should not be taking place in this House, and certainly that these matters should not be determined by politicians from Scotland, England and Wales. My sympathy is with the people of Northern Ireland who, in being denied their own devolved Assembly, have been let down by many of their representatives and the inaction of the UK Government.

The situation in Northern Ireland is not sustainable, as Friday’s court ruling over the proposed incinerator near Newtownabbey highlighted. In the continued absence of any Ministers, planning permission for the project was issued by a civil servant—a decision that, as we have heard, was overturned by the High Court, which found the incinerator to have been unlawfully authorised. I offer no opinion as to the rights and wrongs of the project, but the ruling is significant and underlines the need to re-establish the power-sharing Executive. The ruling affects today’s Bill because spending can only go ahead on decisions made by previous Executives.

I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene at the end of his comments. Out of respect, including for the memory of my late husband, who was the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 10 years, I wonder if I might just ask the right hon. Gentleman to correct what he said earlier—that the Police Service of Northern Ireland took over after the RUC was abolished. The RUC was incorporated into the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many, many distinguished RUC officers still serve proudly in the PSNI.

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The Garda police very differently from the PSNI, and I have to respect them—there is a sovereign state. However, I was about to come on to the point that if we want to recruit the right sort of people more often, from the cross-border areas and cross-party, we must make sure we protect them. One thing that I hope the Secretary of State will raise with her opposite number is that the Garda do not put in place protection in the south for serving police officers from the Garda or from the north. That is a real concern, which was raised with me many times when I was a Minister. If people were coming from the south who needed protection, the only thing that we could do was take them out of the south and bring them into the north, which is obviously wrong. The Garda do not have the same policies as we do and do not support their officers in the same way. That is not criticism of them—they just do it differently—but perhaps the Secretary of State could raise that point with her opposite number.

I know that others want to speak, and I do not want to drag the debate out.

Lady Hermon: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene at the end of his comments. Out of respect, including for the memory of my late husband, who was the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 10 years, I wonder if I might just ask the right hon. Gentleman to correct what he said earlier—that the Police Service of Northern Ireland took over after the RUC was abolished. The RUC was incorporated into the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many, many distinguished RUC officers still serve proudly in the PSNI.

Sir Mike Penning: If the hon. Lady had not asked me to correct the record, I would still have done so—I spoke inappropriately, and I apologise. I also pay tribute to her husband for the work that he did in getting us to where we are today. Sadly, he is no longer with us. I absolutely agree—I had ex-RUC officers in my own close protection when I was out there. Interestingly, I had former British soldiers who had fallen in love with Irish girls and stayed.

I just want to touch on the G8 summit at Lough Erne and the volunteers we had coming across from the mainland—from Great Britain. I remember Steve White of the Police Federation—he has left the federation now, but he is a good friend—telling me, “You will not get officers going over”. How wrong he was. Police officers from Scotland, Wales and England want to go and help their colleagues. I am still struck by what happened at the first briefing when I was there, when those green uniforms walked in and every other officer from around these great nations of ours stood up out of respect. It was not once; it happened again when I went to the Police Federation conference, simply because of the massive respect that other police forces have for the PSNI. As we know, quite a few of them get recruited out of the Province and into the other forces. Surely the sensible thing would be for them to go back and serve with the PSNI.

6.50 pm

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I rise, rather reluctantly, to speak in this debate.

We can all agree that, although it is sadly all too necessary, this budget debate should not be taking place in this House, and certainly that these matters should not be determined by politicians from Scotland, England and Wales. My sympathy is with the people of Northern Ireland who, in being denied their own devolved Assembly, have been let down by many of their representatives and the inaction of the UK Government.

The situation in Northern Ireland is not sustainable, as Friday’s court ruling over the proposed incinerator near Newtownabbey highlighted. In the continued absence of any Ministers, planning permission for the project was issued by a civil servant—a decision that, as we have heard, was overturned by the High Court, which found the incinerator to have been unlawfully authorised. I offer no opinion as to the rights and wrongs of the project, but the ruling is significant and underlines the need to re-establish the power-sharing Executive. The ruling affects today’s Bill because spending can only go ahead on decisions made by previous Executives.

I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene at the end of his comments. Out of respect, including for the memory of my late husband, who was the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary for 10 years, I wonder if I might just ask the right hon. Gentleman to correct what he said earlier—that the Police Service of Northern Ireland took over after the RUC was abolished. The RUC was incorporated into the Police Service of Northern Ireland and many, many distinguished RUC officers still serve proudly in the PSNI.
[Gavin Newlands]

During this moment, we need calm heads and something that has been sadly lacking in this situation: leadership from the UK Government. We need action now to address this stalemate. It has been 18 months since the people of Northern Ireland had the representation they are entitled to and, indeed, voted for. It is not appropriate that day-to-day decisions affecting communities right across Northern Ireland are being made in Whitehall, rather than in the elected Assembly in Stormont, but we are where we are. The people of Northern Ireland have been let down by some of their politicians, but we have zero desire to see them suffer unfunded public services too, so we will support the Bill in order to allow public services in Northern Ireland to continue without interruption.

The lack of progress to restore the Assembly is extremely frustrating. I hope that the politicians in Northern Ireland can find the strength and desire to get back around the negotiating table, find areas of compromise and work together to ensure that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock) hoped the last time Northern Irish budget matters were dealt with, this will be the last time that we in this place are forced to debate and agree issues that should be debated and agreed at Stormont. I should at this point thank my hon. Friend for the great work she has done in this role for the last three years. I am sure that I will be seeking her advice regularly in the coming weeks and months.

The UK Government have to accept responsibility for their failure to restore the devolved institution. I understand that there may have been other important issues for all Departments to prepare for—indeed for their failure to restore the devolved institution. I seek her advice regularly in the coming weeks and months.

As I have indicated, I have no intention to scrutinise the Bill in draft. In addition, even though the budget has been discussed with political parties and businesses, it is unclear if the Secretary of State consulted civil society and trade unions. Over the last few weeks, the Government have shown they lack respect for Scottish devolution with a power grab that ignores the overwhelming vote in the Scottish Parliament. Their failure on this issue of crucial importance to Northern Ireland just proves that they do not care enough about devolution in any part of the UK.

As we debate this budget, it is hard not to notice the elephant in the room: the £1.5 billion survival money the Tories have given to Northern Ireland—care of the DUP—to keep the Prime Minister in 10 Downing Street. Given the current state of affairs and developments today, it could be time for a renegotiation. We have never opposed the funding that was provided to Northern Ireland, but it is completely unacceptable that it was not Barnettised, meaning that Scotland lost out on nearly £3 billion of additional funding.

One of the Secretary of State’s clear difficulties is with other parties having the confidence to engage with her, given her party’s relationship with the DUP. The DUP could bring the Government down on a number of votes. They have huge power and influence over the Government, and the Secretary of State, with all that is going on, has to act as an independent partner in this process. That is difficult when their very survival rests with 10 DUP MPs who have called for direct rule. On Third Reading, therefore, I would be keen to hear what discussions she has had with the other parties on this issue and whether she believes that they have confidence and trust in the UK Government to act as an independent mediator that can help to restore the Assembly and Executive.

As I have said, this is a sorry situation. This will be the third Bill to allocate resources to Northern Ireland to be approved by politicians who should have no role in this process.

Nigel Dodds: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his place and wish him well. We look forward to working with him in Parliament on Northern Ireland issues. He mentioned the DUP and its crucial role in this Parliament. If he applies logic, would he therefore say of Sinn Féin, which is desperate to get into government in the Irish Republic, that in no circumstances should any party in the Republic take it into government, since that would Barnettise Scotland and blur the SNP and the SNP’s role in the political process?

Gavin Newlands: As I have indicated, I have no intention of getting involved in internal political matters in Northern Ireland. That is for the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to resolve, along with the UK Government.

In conclusion, the people of Northern Ireland will continue to be failed as long as some of their own politicians fail to negotiate a deal and this Government continue to be failed as long as some of their own colleagues to resolve, along with the UK Government. The SNP will not stand in their way by impeding that progress this evening, but we must thrash out a deal as soon as possible that sees the Assembly and the power-sharing Executive restored.
6.58 pm

**Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP):** I welcome the Bill tonight because it secures the money we voted to Departments to keep them running until the end of July and assures them that the full funding will be available until the end of the financial year.

We accept, however, that this is not a satisfactory arrangement. Issues such as budget allocations, how the money is spent and the monitoring of how is it spent all require detailed examination by politicians—that is how we get the accountability that should attach to any budget—but we can see from attendance tonight that there is no massive interest in the House. Indeed, there is a certain irony. For the past year, sitting in the Chamber, I have seen Member after Member stand up and say how concerned he or she is about the Brexit negotiations and the impact that Brexit would have on Northern Ireland, the impact that it would have on the Good Friday agreement, and the impact that it would have on community relations and the people of Northern Ireland. However, when it comes to the budget for the people of Northern Ireland, they are nowhere to be seen. I do not think that that irony is lost on the people of Northern Ireland. The pseudo-concern that we have heard from the Labour party during the Brexit debate represents little more than an opportunity to score political points and, conveniently, to use Northern Ireland as a means of arguing against the referendum result and the people who wanted to take us out of the European Union.

**Ian Paisley:** Labour Members who are so interested in whether there should be a hard or a soft border could have put on record their concern about the number of officers who have been recruited to the Northern Ireland border service and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs to deal with these issues, and how those officers have been recruited, but hark! I hear nothing from the Labour Benches.

**Sammy Wilson:** There are plenty of other aspects of the budget that could have been related to the concerns that Labour Members have been expressing. In that regard, Liberal Democrat Members are no different—they too have expressed great concerns—and the same applies to the Liberal Democrats, who are nowhere to be seen. At least some Labour Members are present, but none of the rest has turned up.

This is not a satisfactory arrangement. I think I should use some of my speech to talk about how we got here, why we are here, and who is responsible for the fact that our budget is being dealt with in this way in the House of Commons.

**Lady Hermon:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sammy Wilson:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to make her point later, when she makes her own speech.

This is the second occasion on which the Northern Ireland Budget has come to this House. On the first, in an act of political cowardice the then Finance Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly, Máirtín O Muilleoir of Sinn Féin, refused to bring a budget to the Assembly. Sinn Féin has always liked to hold its hand out for British pounds, but it does not like to make the hard decisions that must be made when it comes to spending money in a responsible way. No budget was brought to the Northern Ireland Assembly in November 2016 when it should have been, and, shortly after that, Sinn Féin collapsed the Assembly.

That was very convenient, because Sinn Féin did not have to make the hard decisions. They wanted the post and the responsibility—they wanted all the kudos that was involved in being head of the Department of Finance—but they did not want to make the hard decisions. It was convenient that the Assembly collapsed—or that Sinn Féin collapsed the Assembly—because that meant that Sinn Féin did not have to put their hand up for a budget.

I have been in that position. When one has to allocate money across Departments, there will always be people who are disappointed, and there will always be criticism. One will be told that one should have prioritised this and should not have given money to that, or that, magically, one should have produced for everyone money that just was not there, which, of course, is not always possible.

The budget came to the House of Commons on the first occasion because of Sinn Féin’s failure to produce a budget; on this occasion, it has come here because Sinn Féin made it impossible for anyone else to produce a budget. Having collapsed the Assembly, Sinn Féin then refused to return to it, appoint Ministers, and enable the Assembly to make decisions about how money was spent and allocated and to present a budget for the people of Northern Ireland. Sinn Féin preferred to engage in a game of blackmail: they would not allow the Assembly to be set up unless all the parties in the Assembly agreed to their agenda, before they were even in the Assembly. Sinn Féin knew that that agenda would have been impossible to deliver had it come to votes in the Assembly—even some of the nationalists would not have voted for it—so what did they do? They sat outside and said, “We have a veto. Under the rules that currently govern Northern Ireland, if we are not included in the Executive that Executive cannot sit, and that Executive will not sit until we get our way and are given promises that the policies we want will be implemented.”

Oddly enough, it seems that Sinn Féin are holding up all political progress in Northern Ireland so that the 4,000 Irish speakers in Northern Ireland can see Irish road signs and can be spoken to in Irish when they telephone about their rates bills, although they can all speak English. We are being held to political ransom. We have Irish broadcasting and Irish schools, and £197 million is spent on all kinds of Irish-medium education. We spend money on Irish festivals, and we allow Irish street names if enough people in the area want them. Despite all that, one of the reasons we are discussing this budget here tonight is that because 4,000 people in Northern Ireland claim to be Irish speakers, Sinn Féin say that unless an Irish language Act makes Irish an official language—which would mean hundreds of millions of pounds of expenditure—they will not allow any progress.

The hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) said that he did not want to become involved in an argument about who was right and who was wrong, and who was responsible. However, if he looked at even the surface of what is happening in
Northern Ireland, he would be able to point the finger of blame—and, by the way, the blame does not lie with the Government at Westminster, although I know that the favourite activity of the Scottish National party is to blame them for everything. The blame for this should not be laid at the door of the Government at Westminster; it should be laid at the door of those who know that they have a veto, who have used that veto irresponsibly, and who are quite happy for this budget to be pushed through the House of Commons today without the level of scrutiny and accountability that would have been possible in a Northern Ireland Assembly.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Sinn Féin often ask about the Irish language and the funding for it, but very few members of Sinn Féin can speak Irish. Is my right hon. Friend as amazed about that as many of the rest of us are?

Sammy Wilson: It does not surprise me at all. Sinn Féin have introduced this hurdle because they do not want the Assembly to be up and running anyway. I shall say more about that in a moment. Sinn Féin prefer the political vacuum, for a reason. The Secretary of State must bear that in mind, as must the hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), who said that he hoped that this was not part of some creeping direct rule. There was a contradiction in his argument, because he then said that we were moving towards a crisis, and that there must be pressure for action. He was right.

There are decisions that need to be made, and we need a process for that. It is clear, however, that one of the parties required to set up the Northern Ireland Executive is determined not to be in that Executive. Its members prefer to sit on the Terrace of the House of Commons, lobbying Ministers and Members, rather than coming in here, and rather than doing their job in Northern Ireland as well. We see them all the time, sitting about this place collecting millions of pounds for not doing their jobs, and at the same time complaining about the outcome of the process. They have pointed the finger at the DUP, and one of the arguments they have made is that my party and those who asked the Government to implement this budget are supporting Tory austerity. However, I can say that we have probably done more to alleviate the impact of austerity in Northern Ireland than Sinn Féin or all the other parties put together, because, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) has pointed out, the confidence and supply arrangement that we reached with the Government was what resulted in the additional resources the Secretary of State has referred to becoming available to the Northern Ireland budget.

I know that the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North would have liked to have had the same benefit. I thought the SNP was opposed to outsourcing, but it appears that it wants to outsource the negotiations on its budget to the DUP, saying to us, “You go and do a deal with the Government and then we will reap the benefits of it.” I think the Government may well be prepared to make the benefits of that kind of confidence and supply arrangement available to the Scottish National party if it is prepared to back the Government in the same way as we have done.

In fact, we had the situation last week when the SNP was so determined to annoy Members of this House that it called votes when we were in the Smoking Room cheering on England to get them through to the quarter-finals—they are now in the semi-finals. What were SNP Members doing? They were doing their best to disrupt our night of enjoyment. They can hardly expect a confidence and supply arrangement from anybody in this House when they behave in that way.

I accept that this is a difficult budget. In cash terms, it is a flat budget. The amount available to Government Departments in Northern Ireland is no different from that in the previous year, and that does present challenges. It presents further challenges when the allocations are based on decisions that the Assembly made nearly two and a half years ago. It set certain priorities, wanting to see over the next five years an extra £1 billion put into the health service, and of course that meant that, since the cake had to be sliced up, other Departments would find that their budgets faced cash reductions.

While this has presented challenges, those challenges have been reduced somewhat due to the additional money obtained for the reform of the health service, the additional money for frontline services in health and education, and the additional money for broadband, infrastructure projects, mental health and areas of severe deprivation. Indeed, some school budgets, or parts of school budgets, have been protected because breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and so on have been able to have money allocated to them from that severe deprivation funding.

Lady Hermon: I want to pick up on the points made earlier by the right hon. Gentleman’s party colleague the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) about schools in his constituency, because I must add to those concerns my worries about school budgets in North Down. The right hon. Gentleman has called on the Government to boost health and education, and the Government in turn have delivered that through the confidence and supply arrangement, so how on earth can it be that budgets in North Down for primary and special care schools are so stretched? Please will the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) explain that to the principals and parents in my constituency?

Sammy Wilson: It comes back to the point I was making about the allocation of the budget and the way in which decisions are made. First, decisions are based on historical decisions made by the Assembly. Secondly, unfortunately, I have to say—this is why the current system is not acceptable and has to be changed—that when allocations are made by civil servants, we cannot be sure that the finance available will always go to what the public might want to prioritise, because bureaucrats see different priorities. For example, I had a long discussion with the permanent secretary in the Department of Education when we found out that some of the additional money that was available for schools and was meant to go to frontline schooling actually went to finance the deficit of the Education Authority. By the way, after the amalgamation of five education and library boards, that authority was still spending as much on administration as the five boards had spent, even though the idea was that one authority would lead to rationalisation and therefore cut costs.
When civil servants are making these decisions, they will often have different priorities, because they see things from the point of view of administration and bureaucracy, and sometimes that will be more important to them than what politicians would see as the priorities. Politicians are being confronted on a day-to-day basis by parents with youngsters with special needs, teachers who are teaching bigger classes, and headmasters who are having to say to parents, “We need you to provide extra money for books, paper and everything else.” Therefore politicians will often have different priorities.

But here is the point: in the absence of devolution, we do not have people in place who are perhaps tuned into those things as priorities. That is one of the disservices that Sinn Féin has done to the people of Northern Ireland. In its pursuit of its ideological goal involving the Irish language, it is prepared to see bad budgetary priorities in Northern Ireland. In its pursuit of its ideological goal involving the Irish language, it is prepared to see bad budgetary priorities.

Therefore politicians will often have different priorities.

**Paul Girvan:** The common funding package used for education has shown up glaring inequalities. There are primary schools in my area that are allocated £2,400 per pupil, yet there will be another sector of education that receives up to £15,000 per pupil. This inequality should not exist. I would have no issue with such policy decisions if we had an Assembly in place, but without an Assembly in place to make decisions, we cannot make those changes.

**Sammy Wilson:** This goes back to my point about the Irish language. Those inequalities often exist because of the preference given under the Good Friday agreement to Irish language legislation, which has consequences in terms of small Irish language schools. Some secondary schools have opened with as few as 14 pupils, which is very costly and has led to the kind of result that my hon. Friend raises. That cannot be changed by a civil servant. That is a political decision, and that is why we need an Assembly up and running in which such decisions can be made, meaning that we can look at funding inequalities and decide whether we should change the priorities.

What is important is that we have a means by which the budget can be spent. The Secretary of State said that there is no difficulty with allocation, but there is a difficulty, as I have explained, with accountability, and the issue with the Department of Education has already been raised by two Members. Different Departments have reacted in different ways, however, and I am pleased that the Department of Health has allocated the additional money it obtained as a result of the confidence and supply arrangement to frontline services. Thousands of people across Northern Ireland will benefit from the allocation of that money to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery. Some people were facing two-year waiting lists, but will now find their waiting time reduced. The results can therefore depend on how Departments react.

Although the Secretary of State has said there is no difficulty in allocating the money, there is a difficulty in accountability, and I take issue with her on that. I have had conversations with permanent secretaries, and difficulties are emerging in the allocation of spending. For example, the permanent secretary in the Department for Infrastructure told me recently that he would have difficulty making a decision about the York Street interchange, for which money has been allocated in the infrastructure budget. He argued that he would not be able to make a decision on that. We have already seen the difficulties over getting the broadband money spent in Northern Ireland, and we know that there are decisions to be made on health reforms. If the health budget is going to be sustainable in the long run, health reform is required, but in order to spend some of the money in the budget on that reform, a change in the nature of some hospitals will be required, including the movement of some services and the concentration of services in other hospitals. According to the courts, those decisions cannot be made by civil servants; they have to be made by Ministers.

The same applies to the school estate. One way of getting more money into the classrooms is through the rationalisation of schools. We have additional school places in Northern Ireland, but in some areas there is a shortage of school places and in others there is a surplus. That requires decisions to be made about school closures and about opening new schools but, again, those decisions need to be made by politicians. I think the Secretary of State is wrong when she says that we do not have any difficulty when it comes to allocation. We are heading towards that difficulty now.

At the other end of the spectrum, I am already in discussions with officials in certain Departments and someone has already mentioned the number of assistant chief constables who are on temporary contracts. They cannot be given permanent contracts because no one is there to make that decision. Applications for a whole range of disabled parking bays are queuing up for a decision, but there is no one there to make those decisions. That might not be an important issue in the global sense, but it is important for people with mobility problems who cannot park their car outside their door. Then there is the issue of school minibuses. Directives have been issued in Northern Ireland to say that teachers need to have a public service vehicle licence to drive those minibuses, even though teachers elsewhere do not have to have them. Many schools have had to give up providing sporting and other after-school activities. It requires a Minister to make decisions on those issues as well. I could go on.

**Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson:** My right hon. Friend, and the Secretary of State and her Minister, might be interested to know that we have been waiting several years for the introduction of a weight limit in Hillsborough village in my constituency. Heavy vehicles are damaging the conservation zone and the historic Georgian buildings in the centre, but the village cannot be afforded the protection it needs because we now need legislation, which requires decisions at a ministerial level. Hillsborough cannot be given the protection it requires, even though Historic Royal Palaces has done a wonderful job in restoring and introducing new facilities at Hillsborough Castle. The whole situation is having an impact on many people in Northern Ireland.

**Sammy Wilson:** I am sure that Members on these Benches could give lots of local examples of decisions not being made on things that matter to individuals and communities because we do not have a local Administration.
I would say to the Secretary of State that we want devolution—we are a devolutionist party and we believe that it is the right thing—but there is increasing cynicism in Northern Ireland about devolution, and the longer we go on without a devolved Administration, the more that cynicism will grow. This is not a case of putting the blame on all the parties and saying that they all need to get together. The pressure has to be put on those who are holding up devolution, the ones who will not go through the doors, the ones who are happy to sit here and sponge off taxpayers, and the ones who are happy to sit in Northern Ireland and complain about no decisions being made while at the same time being the very ones who refuse to allow a situation to develop in which those decisions could be made.

Nigel Dodds: My right hon. Friend is making some powerful points, which I am sure that those on the Treasury Bench are listening to carefully. Just as a marker about decision making might be put down in Committee, such a marker is clearly being put down now, not just by the representatives of Northern Ireland in this House but by business in Northern Ireland. We have heard a lot of talk about business in relation to Brexit. The chambers of commerce, the Institute of Directors and the CBI, which the Secretary of State visited recently, are all saying that it is time to get decisions made in Northern Ireland. That was made clear in a meeting with business representatives that we had two weeks ago. They said, as we are saying, that they want devolution, but in the meantime, there cannot be a situation in which part of the United Kingdom is left without government for 15 months.

Sammy Wilson: That is one of the reasons why I think we will need some intervention. The hon. Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) made the point quite forcefully that Northern Ireland had faced far bigger and more difficult situations than this in the past. I remember when I was a member of the Executive, as was the Member for North Down—[Interruption.] I mean North Belfast. I am sorry. My right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North has taken over North Down as well.

I remember when we faced the devolution of policing. Nothing was more controversial in Northern Ireland than the devolution of policing, especially as it was going to be devolved to an Assembly that contained people who had supported the killing of policemen and women. We were prepared to work at that, however, in order to get an agreement and to get policing devolved to Northern Ireland.

I think that that illustrates the point that this party has been flexible all along when it has come to making devolution work. However, no amount of flexibility is going to get us over a situation in which one party, which has a veto, does not want to make the tough decisions, does not want to be associated with any compromise around Brexit and does not want to have to deal with its murky past when it comes to legacy. That party is determined to use its veto to keep the Assembly from sitting to keep the Executive from being formed. A former leader of our party recently gave a lecture when he was appointed visiting professor at Queen’s University, and he made the point that perhaps we are coming to a time when, if the Government are squeamish about direct rule, we have to look again at the rules of the Assembly that allow a veto for parties that are prepared to use it indefinitely and damage even their own constituents in pursuance of their ideology.

I believe that we will come back next year and have this same debate. We will again have to discuss a budget for Northern Ireland that will be based on decisions made nearly four years ago—as it will be by then—that no longer have much relevance to the changing needs of the Northern Ireland economy. Sadly, that budget will reflect that position, rather than being an up-to-date budget that has been debated by people in Northern Ireland and decided by politicians there.

7.28 pm

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): It is an unparalleled pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). Unusually, I agree with quite a few of the things he has said. I definitely agree that it is a terrible shame that there are so few of us in the Chamber tonight, on our Benches and indeed on the Government Benches. Perhaps that is slightly more explicable today, given the events that have taken place. This feels a bit like “after the Lord Mayor’s show,” in truth, it has felt like this on too many occasions when we have debated Northern Ireland business during this Parliament and the previous one. That should worry us all, and my fear is that the Government are quite content with that state of affairs. I fear that they are content with there being little focus on the issues of Northern Ireland and little appreciation, certainly among the wider public here in Great Britain, of the fact that there is a crisis of governance in Northern Ireland, 18 months after the collapse of the Assembly.

We are making extremely important political decisions today about spending allocations to Northern Ireland that are of import not only to the people of Northern Ireland but to the people of the whole United Kingdom. Although this is the second formal occasion on which we have had a Northern Ireland budget from this Conservative Government, from my recollection it is the sixth or seventh time that we have seen significant amounts of money—millions of pounds—being allocated by successive Secretaries of State. These circumstances cannot continue, because there are consequences that come from a lack of democratic accountability in Northern Ireland, such as civil servants being placed in invidious positions.

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a lack of accountability? When the Assembly was not sitting in 2006, we in this place were allowed to ask written questions on a whole range of issues. Today, however, when I try to table such questions, the answer I get is, “You’re not allowed to ask this question.”

Owen Smith: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is one of the things that has apparently fallen into a black hole, because there has been no real explanation why the position has shifted from the situation under the previous Labour Government, when we had direct rule as a consequence of the collapse of politics in Northern Ireland. Under the current state of affairs, we effectively have direct rule, or at least direct rule-style decisions from this place, yet MPs and Assembly Members do not have the capacity to scrutinise decisions. That cannot be allowed to continue, but it has continued for over 18 months.
Over those 18 months, there has been extraordinary and spectacular inactivity on the Government’s part either to provide a greater degree of accountability or to try to bring about the restoration of the institutions in Northern Ireland. It seems as though pushing things down the road and kicking the can into the distance have been the Government’s preferred modus operandi, which is not good for the people of Northern Ireland or for governance across the whole UK.

Ian Paisley: I was always taught that the purpose of the study of history was to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past. One of the mistakes made in the 1950s and ’60s was that this place became disinterested in what was happening on the ground in Northern Ireland, and we know what happened then. If we do not learn from the past, we will, through the disinterest of this place, repeat what happened then.

Owen Smith: That is a good point well made, and it applies not only to Northern Ireland, although it is particularly important there. Post devolution, the different constituent parts of the United Kingdom are becoming strangers, and there is all too often insufficient understanding of, or interest in, the differences in policy and practice between the different parts, which is not good for our democracy. That is potentially not good for peace or for the prosperity of the people of Northern Ireland—people who have suffered more than most in our country.

There is another lesson of the past that we must learn. It is a more recent lesson from the previous Labour Government, and former Prime Minister Tony Blair deployed the phrase on many occasions. In Northern Ireland, we have to keep the bicycle moving forwards, otherwise it falls over. In recent months, the bicycle seems to be in serious danger of being left on its side on the roadside, because there is no sense of forward momentum in the peace process. There is no sense that the Government have a concerted plan to get things up and running.

We have repeatedly called on the Prime Minister to get more stuck into the talks in Northern Ireland. I think that she is planning to go there next week, and I know that there is a British-Irish intergovernmental conference coming up, but such things have been called for endlessly over the best part of two years, and this is too little, too late. We may well be reaching the point where something starts to go wrong, because the truth is that just as the gaps between the political parties are growing wider, so too are decisions being left unmade.

We have already heard about the need for health reform. I cannot remember how many years ago the Bengoa report came out, but we have seen no movement towards its implementation. My hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd), the Opposition spokesman, mentioned some of the pressing matters that desperately need to be dealt with, such as the Hart inquiry into historical institutional abuse. There are people who suffered horrendously at the hands of others in institutions and who are desperate to see justice and compensation. All parties agree that that is their right, but there has been no movement on that. There has also been no movement on the issue of pensions for victims, but there is a significant degree of agreement across political parties and across the House about how to take things forward. What about the legacy issues—not just the legacy inquests, but how we deal with the legacy of the troubles? Again, there is significant agreement in this House and across Stormont on how that should be taken forward, but we are not seeing the fruits of that agreement.

The problem with all that is that we run the risk that the apathy in Northern Ireland that many people have talked about will harden into cynicism. On this side of the Irish sea, it hardens into long-standing disinterest. That cannot be allowed to happen. I say to the Minister, the Conservative Front-Bench team and, indeed, to my own Front-Bench team that one of the lessons of history we need to learn is that if we have what is in effect direct rule, we cannot afford to be, as the right hon. Member for East Antrim put it, squeamish about calling it direct rule.

Even those of us in this place who are devolutionists must accept that enough will be enough at some point. What will we do if something goes wrong in Northern Ireland? What if there is a problem with safeguarding in a school? What if there is a crisis in the health service in Northern Ireland? What if a problem such as we have seen in Derry/Londonderry over recent days and hours expands into something more problematic? Who will the people of Northern Ireland hold to account? Who will they turn to for answers? Who will we ask questions of, to satisfy ourselves that the right decisions are being taken? The truth is that the Minister cannot answer those questions, because David Stirling and the civil servants in Northern Ireland are the only people holding the baby and carrying the can. That is not fair to them, and it is not good governance.

Not only am I a devolutionist, but I also served as an adviser under the previous Labour Government in the period when we called a spade a spade and realised that, in the absence of the political talks delivering the restoration of the institutions, we needed direct rule and to call it direct rule. My direct challenge to the Minister is to tell us why the Government are so concerned about acknowledging the situation. I would understand it if he were to stand up and say, “We think that would make it much more difficult to bring about the institutions.” I would understand it if he stood there and said, “We think it would deeply damage relations with the Government of the Republic.” However, I suspect that he is not prepared to accept either of those things.

I suspect that the Minister is not prepared to say that we are going to see, as a corollary of introducing direct rule, lots and lots of BIIGCs, because that will not please some Members. However, I think we had 25 BIIGCs when the Assembly was last in abeyance. That would be the corollary, and it would be absolutely the right thing to do to ensure that the co-guarantors of the Good Friday agreement—the UK Government and the Irish Republic’s Government—had a say in things. I do not understand why the Government are so loth to call a spade a spade, to acknowledge that we have direct rule by stealth and to get on with putting in place either direct rule or a plan to get us out of the twilight zone in which we currently reside. It is not good for governance; it is not good for the people of Northern Ireland; and, to put it plainly, it is not sustainable.

7.39 pm

Emma Little Pengelly (Belfast South) (DUP): Five hundred and forty-five days ago, Martin McGuinness, the then Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, resigned.
That action, which was not agreed with us, Sinn Féin's partners in government—it was a unilateral decision—triggered the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly. On 24 January 2017, I was in the Northern Ireland Assembly during the last few hours of the sitting. Incredibly, it means there has been no Government, no democratic accountability and no real decision making in Northern Ireland for 531 days.

We talk often of our great British democracy, yet it genuinely grieves me when I look across this House and see the lack of interest in this shocking constitutional crisis happening within the United Kingdom today. That is 531 days without Ministers and Members sitting in the Assembly making the decisions that affect real people on the ground in Northern Ireland.

Nigel Dodds: I entirely share my hon. Friend's concerns and her views, but I suppose one could look at the empty Benches and the non-representation of most of the major parties in a slightly different way. It puts to rest the idea that there would be widespread outrage and concern here if there were direct rule, because it is quite clear that nobody is that exercised when we have a measure of direct rule. Nobody is outraged enough about it to turn up to speak, to vote or to say anything about it; they are quite happy to go about their business elsewhere and to allow this to go through the House virtually unopposed. I suppose one could look at it in that way.

Emma Little Pengelly: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend. The reality is that the Democratic Unionist party is a party of devolution. We want to get the Assembly restored. We do not want direct rule, but we need direct rule. The people of Northern Ireland need direct decision making, because urgent decisions are not being made at the moment.

I would say to the Minister and to the Secretary of State that the time has long passed for action to be taken on these important matters. I assure everybody that the Democratic Unionist party wants to get back to work. I understand that all the other parties are in the same position—they want to get back into government and into the Northern Ireland Assembly to do the job they were elected to do—but there is one party preventing that from happening.

There is one party, alone in Northern Ireland—the party that collapsed the Northern Ireland Assembly—saying to all of us, “Unless you meet our demands, there will be no Government.” I say very clearly that this is not a party political point. Whenever we try to highlight the difficulties in Northern Ireland, it is incredibly frustrating that people turn around, just someone in the front seat of a car, and day, “You’re all as bad as each other.” The reality of it is that we would go into government immediately, and many of the other parties are in the same position. But there is one party saying, “If you do not agree to our demands, there will be no Government.”

That is not just sad and frustrating for the politicians and parties in Northern Ireland; it is most sad and disappointing for the people of Northern Ireland. The person sitting on a waiting list in pain, who is trying to get seen and trying to get a necessary procedure, or perhaps to get a test about which they are deeply worried—my colleagues and I speak to such people day in, day out and week in, week out—needs to get help and support, but because there is no decision making on vital issues such as health transformation, they cannot get that support.

Children are sitting in schools that have had to make decisions to lose teachers—to make teachers redundant—because the Assembly cannot make a decision to stop that happening. Families have come in to see me distressed, perhaps in tears, and struggling because they cannot access public services as there are no Ministers in place and no one with democratic accountability who can listen and react to help them. It is those families and individuals who are suffering most because of Sinn Féin’s action in refusing to go into government and boycotting the Northern Ireland Assembly. That is not right, and it is not fair.

I am not opposed to the Irish language, and I know that my party is not opposed to the Irish language. I have the utmost respect for those who want to speak a language and enjoy cultural rights, but it is beyond doubt that the Irish language Act remains a divisive and controversial issue in Northern Ireland. We have said clearly to Sinn Féin, and we said it in good faith, “Get back into government, deal with issues of health, education and public services, and we will commit to continuing to talk about these difficult issues.” Every party in Northern Ireland and across the United Kingdom has particular things that it would like to see, which might not be shared with other parties. We have to build consensus, and we have to try to find a way through, but what we do not do is throw a tantrum, collapse the democratic institutions and make demands, saying “We cannot get back into doing our job and working for the people of Northern Ireland, until our demands are met.”

Unfortunately, I believe the Court of Appeal’s Buick judgment gave an untrue and inaccurate perception that decisions were being made in the Departments up until the Court said that could not happen. Huge numbers of really straightforward, non-controversial, benign decisions are not being made. One example is that a Department here made a decision to put funds to one side to celebrate the extension of the franchise to women, and there was an unhypothecated Barnett consequential for the block grant in Northern Ireland. It was not a huge amount of money, about £200,000 to £300,000, for a scheme so that community groups, particularly women’s groups, could celebrate the extension of the franchise to women. Scotland and Wales announced that they would use the funds they got as part of the Barnett consequential to put the scheme in place, so I wrote to ask the Department of Finance whether it would do the same. The response, which I receive all the time, was, “There are no Ministers in place. We cannot make a decision to put a new scheme in place. Therefore this money will be used in a range of different ways.” I hear that all the time, across scores and scores of decisions that are needed in every single Department. That was before the Buick case came to court.

It is not just about the big issues of infrastructure. We have heard about the historical institutional abuse victims, who should get the funds and support they want and need. We have heard about pensions for those who were seriously injured during the troubles in Northern Ireland—I have met them on a regular basis. As I have told the House previously, those who speak to them and hear
their stories of the pain they are enduring, day in and day out, will be hugely sympathetic. They need decisions. That group is getting older, but the decisions cannot be made. It is not all about the big decisions; these are everyday decisions.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) mentioned the business community, for which, again, there are a whole range of decisions to be made. The “Streets Ahead” programme in Belfast is not controversial, and everyone would agree with it, but there is no Minister to make decisions, which is crippling the system in Northern Ireland and has been for 531 days.

The Northern Ireland Assembly has a scrutiny role. As I said in November when the Northern Ireland Budget Act 2017 came before the House, I was the last Chair of the Northern Ireland Assembly’s Finance Committee. That Committee performed a valuable role—I am conscious that I am sitting beside my right hon. Friends the Members for Belfast North and for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), who are former Finance Ministers in Northern Ireland, and they may or may not agree about how valuable the Committee’s role was, but there is no doubt that the Committee’s role in the democratic process, of scrutinising, making recommendations, speaking to the Departments, getting information, speaking to stakeholders in Northern Ireland about what they wanted to see in the budget, and producing those reports, was very necessary. That is not happening now, and it has not been happening for 531 days.

My right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim mentioned the last Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, a colleague of mine in South Belfast. I was Chair of the Finance Committee in the last week before the Assembly fell—my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Paul Girvan) served on the Committee with me—and we put on a special meeting in which Máirtín Ó Muilleoir was invited to come along to speak about the budget and the priorities, to give us information on what he was hearing from Departments and stakeholders, and to try to see if we could get the budget through. He did not turn up. He turned around and said, “I am too busy.” Sinn Féin then chose the timing of the collapse. We were hearing from Departments and stakeholders, and we put on a special meeting in which Máirtín Ó Muilleoir was invited to come along to speak about the budget and the priorities, to give us information on what he was hearing from Departments and stakeholders, and to try to see if we could get the budget through. He did not turn up. He turned around and said, “I am too busy.” Sinn Féin then chose the timing of the collapse. With the greatest respect, it is not good enough for people here to step back and say, “You’re all as bad as each other.” We are dealing with objective facts: who is responsible for this, and who is a barrier to getting government back in Northern Ireland?

In conclusion, we in the DUP are in this House today doing our jobs: standing up for all in Northern Ireland. The DUP will continue to fight for what is best for everybody in Northern Ireland. That is exactly what we have done in relation to the confidence and supply agreement. While others run about for their pet projects, we did not come to the table and say, “Here are our pet projects. Fund those.” We made it a priority to get funds for everybody in Northern Ireland, across the communities—for health, education, infrastructure and anti-poverty work. That is what we do and will continue to do. While others such as Sinn Féin boycott this House and the Northern Ireland Assembly, I say clearly to the Secretary of State and the Minister that they should work with those who want to work for Northern Ireland, who are doing their jobs for the people of Northern Ireland and who want to continue to do everything they can to build a better and brighter future for all, across all communities, in Northern Ireland.

### Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP)

7.51 pm

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): At the outset, I wish to take a moment to pay tribute to the life of one of my constituents, Mr William Dunlop, who sadly perished on Saturday in a motorcycle race. He was an immensely talented athlete who had won more than 108 races during his short career as a motorcycle racer. He had achieved four podium finishes at the TT course on the Isle of Man and had won several races in various of Northern Ireland’s most exciting road races. He hails from Ballymoney and from the Dunlop family; his uncle Joey was a world-renowned motorcycle racer and his father Robert perished a few years ago in front of William’s very eyes at a motorcycle race in the constituency of East Londonderry.

William Dunlop was a gentleman. He was a young man who had a quad bike and a child in the way—another bouncing baby to enjoy. Unfortunately, he perished so tragically at the Skerries road race in north Dublin on Saturday evening. It puts into perspective the extinction that lies at one end of motorcycle sport and the ecstasy at the other. Over the same weekend, a colleague of his from County Antrim, Johnny Rea, was successful and has now won, in effect, four world motorcycle championships—this is the largest record and probably will never be achieved again. I want to take this moment to pay tribute to William Dunlop and to his family, as constituents of mine, for the great way in which they have handled this set of tragic circumstances. I hope that Members will take a moment to reflect on that in the days ahead, as the funeral occurs in Northern Ireland.

Turning to the matter before us, it is not sustainable to continue on the road that we are on. Northern Ireland requires effective and good government. I understand the challenges: if we introduce direct rule, it will bring about unintended consequences. There will be things the Government will end up doing that we will not like and there will be things the Labour party will introduce, as amendments, that we will not like. Those unintended consequences are a reality check, saying to us that we must get on with the restoration of devolution, which we all want. Alternatively, in the absence of even talks to achieve that, the Secretary of State and her Northern Ireland team have a duty to get on with the delivery of good government, and that means ministerial decisions. They can call it anything they like. We are not going to be squeamish about what it is called, but, in effect, the Secretary of State needs to take direct ministerial rule into Northern Ireland and start effectively governing.

We are told every day by the Government and by many others that they are committed to “the Belfast agreement being implemented in full.” We hear in the Brexit negotiations, and on devolution and the settlement in Northern Ireland, that the Belfast agreement must be implemented in full. But the fact is that it has broken; it is not being implemented in full. As we so eloquently heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly), one side has decided to break the Belfast agreement and single-handedly to stop the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is an integral part of that agreement, operating. If one part of it is not being implemented, the entire agreement is in jeopardy and we need to have ministerial decisions taken, and taken effectively. I call on the Secretary of State again to step up and make sure that these decisions are taken.
Some points have been made strongly tonight by my right hon. Friend the Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) about Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin want all these things done in Northern Ireland, and their Members come to Westminster and they lobby on the Terraces, but they are not prepared to take their seats in here and argue their case. It reminds me of the poem from 1791:

“We’re bought and sold for English gold—
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation!”

Sinn Féin are acting in a roguish way. We have to face up to that, as do the public, and deal with that roguish element. We must almost embarrass them into taking on the role that they are elected for.

I have challenged the Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee and again here tonight about the budget and how it is allocated. If she is able to reapportion £100 million from one section of the budget to another in order to make it balance its books, she is therefore able to take other decisions. I encourage her to do so, because those decisions are crucial for the good governance of Northern Ireland, which is one of her key priorities. We have mentioned issues to do with policing tonight, and I will not repeat them; suffice it to say that we need decisions taken immediately on policing.

On 15 May, our Northern Ireland Affairs Committee unanimously agreed a report about policing. Its members agreed the following:

“We recommend that the Secretary of State amends the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 to ensure that the Policing Board can exercise its statutory functions now”.

That was in May! We need the Secretary of State to introduce this immediately and to ensure that the Policing Board becomes functional and is therefore allowed to deal with the budgetary pressures, the recruitment issues and all the key needs of the PSNI.

Our report, which was on “Devolution and democracy in Northern Ireland—dealing with the deficit”, reads as a catalogue of shame. We should put some of that catalogue on the record, because Members have talked tonight about where decisions ought to be taken. Our report strenuously lists those issues, Department by Department. It sets out the fact that the industrial strategy consultation was completed in April 2017 but there is no Executive in place to consider it. The report on the role that they are elected for.

Our draft tourism strategy, developed by Tourism Northern Ireland, was presented to the Department of the Economy. We need a Minister in place and a budget in place to implement that strategy. A proposal was made to cut tourism VAT specifically in Northern Ireland to deal with the heavy competition that we face from the Republic of Ireland. The UK Government launched the consultation, and the implementation should then be in the hands of the devolved Government. It has not been implemented in Northern Ireland.

The development of Kilkeel harbour is a massive infrastructure project, but the lack of a Minister has caused the plans for the harbour to be halted. Yet we are about to try to take advantage of Brexit and the opportunities it offers for our fishing fleet when we are an independent seafaring nation. That project has run into the sand until we have a Minister to allocate around £450,000 to take it to the next stage.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I wrote recently to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs about the food processing grant scheme in Northern Ireland. The scheme has been of significant benefit to food producers in other parts of the United Kingdom, but has not yet been implemented in Northern Ireland. The permanent secretary and his team responded by saying:

“At this point in time, DAERA has no plans to launch the proposed scheme in the absence of a Minister.”

That is yet another example of our biggest industry in Northern Ireland being disadvantaged by there being no decisions as a result of Sinn Féin’s boycott of Stormont.

Ian Paisley: My right hon. Friend makes an important point. Our key industry is agri-food products. We produce the best, tastiest and most traceable food on these islands. It is a multibillion-pound industry. Because it is traceable, it offers our kingdom food security. The issue that my right hon. Friend has put his finger on is explained clearly in the budget statement that we got from the Minister. The Northern Ireland budget for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is almost going to double this year, from £39 million in 2017-18 to £77 million in 2018-19, but none of the critical decisions, one of which was highlighted by my right hon. Friend, can actually be processed. Money is set aside for agri-food development, but those decisions cannot be processed because there is no Minister in place to take the key decisions.

This is a catalogue of shame and there is no one here to cry about it. A few weeks ago, we were hauled over the coals by certain Members for social policy issues, yet here we are discussing issues of poverty, employment and people’s livelihoods, and I do not hear a murmur, yet it is a catalogue of shame.

I shall go on, because the catalogue is atrocious. The York Street interchange was a key issue that we put on the confidence and supply budget, and we are setting aside around £400 million to £500 million to develop it. That project is paused owing to a legal challenge. A substantial scheme that would usually have ministerial accountability and then be allowed to proceed cannot actually go ahead. That is critical, because it shows that a paralysis is developing in the Departments. We are going to end up with government by judicial review. In fact, we are going to have governance stopped by the
people running the courts. I respect judges and I respect lawyers, but they are not elected to stop the process of government. The people have elected Members to this House and they expect the Government in this House to take these key decisions.

The shadow Secretary of State mentioned the north-south interconnector. Planning permission was granted following an independent report prepared by the Planning Appeals Commission. That decision was made by the civil service in the absence of a Minister because it was in the public interest, but it has not been implemented because it needs the next step, in which the Minister actually signs off the decision. That project has now been paused. Many Members from various parties have talked about maintenance projects and capital spending projects for schools and hospitals. The report says, time after time, of a host of capital projects, that no Minister is able to sign the project off. It says:

“In absence of Minister, zero-based approach taken”

and that no capital funding will be assumed for capital projects, even the priority ones.

The A5 project is a huge road network scheme in the west of the Province. The project has been paused owing to a legal challenge, and a substantial scheme that would usually have ministerial accountability is not going to take place until a Minister is in place. The next phase of the school enhancement programme for the next four years is delayed because there is no Minister. This is what the civil servants are telling us. Ten school building schemes are currently at the design or feasibility stage, but they have all been paused until a Minister is in place to take the next decision. This cannot go on. This is a catalogue of shame.

I notice that the chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), is present; since he led us through the process and we published the report on 15 May, that section is now twice as thick, with other decisions backing up. Last month, the chief of police brought one of those decisions to us, along with all the issues related to policing. I asked why we have not had the legal aid improvements or changes that are being enjoyed by other citizens throughout the United Kingdom. Once again, those matters were consulted on in Northern Ireland and a report has been brought forward, but it cannot be signed off and implemented because we do not have a Minister to take the decision.

On community pharmacies and setting the tariff for drugs in Northern Ireland, I know that the Secretary of State would solve that issue for us at the drop of a hat, but it is not going to be done because there is no Minister willing to step up to the plate and make the decisions. I could take hours going through the report and putting these matters on the record. I call on the Government to get on with it and start governing.

8.8 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I echo the sentiments of my hon. Friend the Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) in relation to the passing of William Dunlop. We all understand the family’s heartache and wish to convey our thoughts and prayers to them at this time. I have a brother who raced bikes—indeed, he raced with the Dunlop family over a great period of time. He had a very serious accident, but he lives today, whereas William Dunlop and the other Dunlops do not live. We think of the family at this time, and it is important that we do so.

I thank the Government, and particularly the Secretary of State, for introducing this legislation. I echo the frustration expressed by others about the process. I can well remember the story told in my office about the husband of one of the girls, who used to get his hands on what was then referred to as the Index book and circle presents he wanted from Santa. His dad was a pastor and in no way able to fulfil those requests. Ultimately, there was always something that he did not get, and that was the one thing that he really wanted. My parliamentary aide has implemented with her children a three-present rule: the children can ask for only three presents to avoid disappointment. There is a logic to it—it is not an Ulster Scotsism.

I feel like I am circling the Index book of needs for Northern Ireland while knowing that without a working Assembly, there is no way that the man in red—or, indeed, in this case the man with the red briefcase—can get it right, but there are asks that I believe we truly need out of this budget. Even at this stage, I am urging that the red briefcase be used to help the Secretary of State to meet our greatest needs.

The shadow Secretary of State mentioned my name in relation to the north-south interconnector. He shares our frustration that while we have a north-south interconnector, we are not even sure whether we will actually be able to use it. Decisions are made, but there is no process in place to ensure that it actually happens. It is an important project, with great benefits for both the north and the south, but particularly for us in Northern Ireland. I wait to hear from the Minister whether the interconnector will go ahead.

The DUP, as all Members know, made a deal on confidence and supply, securing £1.4 billion for all people in Northern Ireland from all religious persuasions and all political parties. I say to the new Northern Ireland spokesperson for the SNP, the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands)—we wish him well in his new position—that if he needs any training in how to secure a good deal, we might be available to help him. We can give him some good advice.

We all understand that the 1998 Belfast agreement does not allow for the full budget to be allocated. However, we are at the stage where 95% of the budget can be spent. My first ask is that instead of allocating £20 million of the supply and confidence additional funding, can we please have all the outstanding money allocated? The money is there to be allocated, so let make it happen. Will the Secretary of State please release the money, as it will enable us to do several things that are essential to keep our schools open and our NHS running. Will she allow the release of funds to enable the Education Authority to swallow the budget restriction that has been imposed on schools? That restriction is leading to more pressure on small schools. Even larger schools are being forced to lose teachers. I have wonderful schools in my rural communities, but they may be forced to close their doors because they cannot save £40,000 unless they lose a teacher, which effectively means that the school will close.

Can the Secretary of State release funding to subsidise urban and rural primary schools? Many primary schools in my constituency are waiting for extensions and classrooms are bulging at the seams. Grey Abbey Primary
School is one that comes to mind right away, and we also have Ballywalter Primary School, for which we have been pursuing the case for some time, and Killinchy Primary School. These schools need help now, not tomorrow and not in five years’ time. Glastron College has been waiting for a new build for up to 10 years. We have been told that it is now on a five to six-year programme, but the school is over-subscribed. The numbers are increasing each year, so we need money to be released for the new build. What happens if we have a process where those expansions cannot happen? We need a Minister in place. We have a Department that effectively cannot make that decision.

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) referred to education in North Down. She and I, along with my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), share a special needs school. Longstone Special School and Killard Special Needs School have particular needs now, not at some stage down the line. The principal at Killard has written letters to all of us to say that work needs to be done in his school right now. Members must understand our frustration.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): My hon. Friend mentioned Longstone Special School, which is in my constituency. I hope that he agrees that this issue should really cut to the heart of the discussion about resources. I had an email from a year 10 pupil at Longstone saying, “We may be special needs children, but can you help us get a library?” A library? We are talking about access to books in a school. That is one of the resource implications that is coming to the fore due to continual underinvestment for our special children who need help the most.

Jim Shannon: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is absolutely right. Torbank Special Needs School is another that comes to mind right along with Longstone and Killard—there are three schools. The school teachers, the classroom assistants and the parents all want to see better resources for their pupils and schools, and we need to encourage them. Things are being held up due to red tape, which means that things cannot be improved, which is immensely frustrating.

Why is the Department for Education’s investment budget being reduced by some 4% in the 2017-18 final budget while most other Departments have had their investment budgets increased? Why is the investment budget of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs almost doubling from £39 million in 2017-18 to £77 million in 2018-19? We had a meeting with the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the hon. Member for North West Cambridgeshire (Mr Vara), the week before last, along with Lakeland Dairies from Newtownards, to look at the capital grant scheme. As we move towards Brexit, we are aware that we need the grant system in place to enable capital schemes in the fishing ports of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. We need the money in place, but we do not have a Department that is able to function fully. We are out of Europe next year, and we are incredibly frustrated that we will not be in a position to respond.

The annually managed expenditure budget, which is mostly for welfare, shows a 16% increase over the past two years. What is the underlying reason for that increase? No one has mentioned—at least not directly—the local roads budgets for our Departments and our section officers. They have had no increase in their moneys for the past few years. Indeed, those moneys have been decreased over the past couple of years. I am pleased to see that Ballyblack Road East has been resurfaced in the past four weeks. That is good news, but Ballygalget Road in Portaferry has not been done. The Dalton Road estates has not been done either. The reasons for our frustrations are clear. The system does not seem to respond to our needs as the elected representatives of our constituents. We need a Department that can work with us. No white lines have been put down in parts of my constituency for more than two years. We have got to the position where a person knows that they have to be on the left hand side of the road, but there is no white line to tell them where the middle of the road is. People will say that they know that they have to be on the left hand side of the road and that they will not stray, but we understand their frustration when we see such decay and when things that should be done are not being done.

I agree with David Sterling’s briefing regarding the needs for the 2018-19 budget that was published in December 2017. Some £410 million from the confidence and supply agreement could be spent, with £80 million for immediate health and education pressures and £30 million for programmes to address mental health and severe deprivation. Just today, and over the weekend, the press back home informed us—some of us probably knew this already—that Northern Ireland has among the highest levels of suicide. The constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) has some of the highest levels of suicide in the whole of Northern Ireland, and indeed in the whole of the UK. We want to address the issue of mental health and severe deprivation, but we need to do that with a functioning Assembly and a functioning Department. We had a meeting earlier this year with a number of Northern Ireland charities. We want to address this issue, and we are keen to see the Northern Assembly addressing it, but we have a frustration with the system, which does not seem to have the same capacity or interest.

Let me go back to the budget. Some £100 million is being spent on ongoing work to transform the health service in line with the broad-based consensus fostered by the Bengoa report. As Members have mentioned, there is a £20 million shortfall for psychiatry alone. Again, we need a Department that can address these things. I brought up the situation involving insulin pumps at the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee last week. The
at that time. There are now 6,715, so there is a clear
commission reported that there were 7,500 police officers
and criminal activities. I understand that the Patten
live off the backs of others through their drugs-related
and reduce paramilitarism, and to deal with those who
able to respond and to deliver on its project to take on
Members will understand why we need a PSNI that is
fully support, as will everyone in the House. Hon.
which has a new policy and strategy for Northern Ireland
funding to address public services and police resources.
and £100 million to be transferred from existing capital
£4 million to prepare the ground for transformation,
and supply arrangement, but we need a method of
for broadband that we secured through the confidence
we have now reached a stalemate. We have the money
the idea of people in businesses working from home, but
Northern Ireland for the way in which they have promoted
to them.
The issue of broadband has been mentioned. There
are small and medium-sized businesses in my constituency
that are run from people’s homes. We want to encourage
people to start small businesses. I thank the Government
for their policy, and the Northern Ireland Assembly and
the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment
in Northern Ireland for the way in which they have promoted
the idea of people in businesses working from home, but
we have now reached a stalemate. We have the money
for broadband that we secured through the confidence
and supply arrangement, but we need a method of
getting that money out. David Sterling also mentioned
the fact that 50 experienced police officers
leave every month. I understand that it takes six months
to train 100 recruits; in theory, every six months we are
falling behind by 400, so hon. Members will understand
our frustration. We need money to train officers and to
ensure that those officers are in place.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: My hon. Friend will not be
aware of this, but I and some of our senior colleagues
from the DUP recently had a security briefing from the
Chief Constable, who indicated that the threat from
paramilitaries is not just one of organised crime, as
some on the republican side now pose a very potent
threat to national security and are engaged in planning
acts of terrorism in Northern Ireland. That is why the
PSNI needs resources. It is not only to deal with organised
crime, but to counter this very real terrorist threat.

Jim Shannon: I absolutely support my right hon. Friend.

I will give an example of the activities of some
paramilitaries. Just this week in my town of Newtownards,
a group of people from outside the Strangford constituency
came in and tried to assert their authority. We have to be
careful with how that goes. They were having a bonfire. Two guys from another constituency came into
Newtownards on Sunday morning and sat there in their
very expensive Land Rovers or Jeeps. The price of the
two Jeeps would probably be the price of somebody’s
house. The assets branch needs to look at what those
people are up to, take all the money they earned from
criminal activities, and make sure they are accountable
for their actions. The quicker that that happens the
better.

What we are really saying is that a lot needs to be
done. Will the Secretary of State release the funding
that is not affected by the Good Friday agreement and
save our schools, pay our nurses correctly and secure
our community pharmacies, particularly in rural areas?
We have kept our end of the bargain. We come to this
place and do what is best for our constituents. Will
someone please make the decision to do what is best for
the people of Northern Ireland? End the stalemate.
Allow Northern Ireland to function instead of crippling
it with an inability to make decisions, or perhaps the
punishment of refusing to do so.

My local businesses are suffering.—[Interruption.] Madam Deputy Speaker, the coughing reminds me of
your indication to come to a conclusion; I will do so
shortly. I just want to say that we need something for
our high streets and for the businesses that are struggling
to do better.

Karen Bradley: May I suggest that the hon. Gentleman’s
high street enters the Great Britain and Northern Ireland
high street competition that the Government are running?
The closing date is in August, and we would very much
welcome entries from high streets in Northern Ireland.

Jim Shannon: The Secretary of State has given me a
challenge. I will certainly take her up on it and ensure
that Newtownards High Street will be at the forefront
of her paperwork, hopefully before the end of July.
Although high streets have done extremely well in the
last month and their turnover is up, that is perhaps a wee bit seasonal. We need to do something to bring business back, including by taking legislative steps.

I want to comment on the Irish language. Sometime in life, we have to agree to differ on things, and there is something that we cannot agree on in the Irish language. We do not want the Irish language introduced to primary schools against the will of the majority of students, pupils and parents. We do not want Irish street names up in Saintfield. People in my constituency told me that that was a massive issue for them at the last election. We do not want cross-departmental money wasted on the Irish language when it is not necessary, and we do not want the Irish language in the courts, where there is certainly not a zest and an energy for that. What we do want is the right to have an Irish language; we are not against the idea of it. Some £160 million has been spent on it, so it is very clear that we are not against the idea. At the same time, we do not want an Irish language Act. There will not be an Irish language Act, and the quicker people catch on the better.

Although I thank the Secretary of State for this step, it is not enough. Take control; take us back from the brink of school closures. More money than ever should be available. Take us back from the position in which diabetic pumps are available but no one is trained to use them. Take us back to a functioning Northern Ireland that is not held to ransom by those who will not even take their seats to discuss the funding that all people in Northern Ireland need regardless of their age, sex, political views, religious views or anything else. Northern Ireland needs direction. We look to the Secretary of State for that leadership and direction—please provide it.

8.28 pm

Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): If one thing has been consistent throughout this extremely well-informed and passionate debate, it is the roiling, boiling frustration of people who want to see something done, who need to see something done and who want to speak up for their constituents but are prevented. It is crucial that that message comes out loud and clear.

The debate started with a very telling contribution from the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) and ended with a contribution from the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning). We sometimes forget about the PSNI from my good friend, the hon. Member (Sir Mike Penning) and ended with a contribution from the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning). W e sometimes forget

Many people will remember the death in 2011 of Ronan Kerr, a young PSNI officer killed at Killiclogher. I remember that when I stood with Peter Robinson, the then leader of the DUP, at Beragh, about half of the PSNI officers made the sign of the cross and about half of them snapped off a very, very sharp salute. I thought, “This is future of policing in Northern Ireland.” I actually felt that there was some real hope. If we, as politicians, cannot show the same confidence, strength, trust and belief in the future as that cross-community expression of belief, we are letting them down—but, above all, we are letting down all the people of Northern Ireland.

I respect the right hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead. I was his shadow once. I was a very insubstantial shadow because he was a very substantial Minister. He did an excellent job, and I appreciate his comments today.

I welcome the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) to the SNP Front Bench. On behalf of not just my colleagues on the Labour Benches but, I hope, the whole House, I pay our respect and thanks to the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who was an excellent Northern Ireland spokesperson for the SNP. I assume that she has been promoted. In the present febrile state of British politics, she could be in the Cabinet for all I know. I consider it unlikely, but who knows? I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s comments and for the hon. Lady’s work.

I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that I have known the DUP and individual DUP Members for many years. He encouraged them to seek further benefit—further financial advantage and fiscal goodies—from the Government. If there is one group of people on God’s green earth who need no encouragement, it is the Democratic Unionist party. I am sure that they are grateful for his warm advice, but when it comes to upping the ante, they wrote the book.

We heard from the right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson). Every time I hear the weather forecast, I always imagine some dreadful warning of a gale that is coming from Larne and I know that he is about to get to his feet. What his pupils must have thought in the days when he was a very distinguished economics lecturer, I cannot imagine. I presume that there is an entire generation of deafened people from East Antrim who were taught by him. He talked about a flat budget. I think that there has in fact been a 4.2% uplift from the opening position, so it is not a flat budget from that point of view. However, I entirely understand that doing this tonight simply takes us forward to the end of the financial year. We are not actually solving the problem but simply allowing matters to proceed in the present time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) spoke lyrically and from a position of great strength and knowledge. He talked about the lacuna of scrutiny and the spectacular inactivity that we are suffering from. That is such an important point, and we keep coming back to it—the absence of scrutiny and the inability of questions to be answered. It was also mentioned in an intervention. I look to the Government Benches for some way in which this can be addressed, because surely right hon. and hon. Members must have the right to ask questions, even during this period. When he referred to the fact that we must not turn away, he made a desperately important point.

I am in no way going to criticise the right hon. Member for East Antrim, but he referred to the presence of certain people in the House tonight. Some Labour Members may not be here physically, but the Labour party and my colleagues will never, ever turn our backs on Northern Ireland. We will never, ever shunt this off into the distance. We will always be thinking and concerned about Northern Ireland. If we are not here physically, then, believe you me, we are here mentally and here emotionally. Our commitment is as strong as it always has been, and I hope always will be in future. I suppose that I should, in passing, congratulate the non-abstentionist
Northern Ireland MPs who are here tonight. Every single one of them is here present, and the record will show that as much as the television pictures will have shown it earlier on.

The hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly), in one of the most important speeches I have heard for a long time, brought this whole matter to a head: she referred to her constituents. Sometimes, when we talk about political theory, financial matters and fiscal arrangements, we almost operate on an ethereal level where we do not consider the day-to-day needs of our constituents. She talked about the reality of the health transformation programme, which is not going forward because of the absence of a devolved Assembly and an Executive. She talked about the impact on schools and the inability to undertake the cross-community work that I am so proud of and that she is such a strong exponent of. We heard the voice of a constituency Member of Parliament who was not making a political point from some theoretical standpoint or for party political advantage, but speaking on behalf of her constituents—constituents whom we are not serving best at present, in the absence of a devolved Assembly or an Executive.

I would like to associate myself and my colleagues with the expression of regret to William Dunlop. I cannot imagine any family who stand higher in the annals of road racing and motorcycling, nor who have been cursed on the one hand by so much tragedy but blessed on the other hand by so many achievements, than the Dunlop family. There can be no finer example of sportsmanship and achievement in road racing; what a great family. I think that we all extend our sympathy to them. I know that the family will be sustained by the memories of a truly great road racer—not just one, but a whole family.

The hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) talked about unintended consequences and called for direct ministerial rule. I looked across to those on the Government Benches to see whether they were leaping forward at that and champing at the bit, longing to do it. I like to think that none us here actually want to see the rest of the community in Northern Ireland can go about their daily business safely. Let us not underestimate the important work they do. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we have only recently received the PSNI business plan and proposals, and we will of course consider them carefully.

SIR MIKE PENNING: The Minister quite rightly mentions the work of frontline police officers, but we must not forget their families and loved ones. By committing ourselves to being in the PSNI, police officers put their friends and loved ones at risk, and we must make sure that we protect them and give them our gratitude, too.

MR VARA: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The families have the daily worry and concern of their loved ones going out to make sure that the rest of community can get about safely, and it is quite right that they too are recognised and acknowledged.

May I take this opportunity to welcome the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire North (Gavin Newlands) to his post? I add my good wishes to his predecessor, the hon. Member for Edinburgh North and Leith (Deidre Brock), who did an excellent job. I do not know what role she has, but whatever it is, I am sure she will serve in it with equal diligence. I echo the hon. Gentleman’s comments about wanting the devolved Assembly to be up and running, which I think we all want in this House. It has been raised consistently by many Members, and I will come on to that later.

The right hon. Member for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson) spoke with his characteristic passion. He is right to speak about the additional funds for Northern Ireland pursuant to the confidence and supply agreement. It is important to recognise that that money will be spent for...
[Mr Vara]

the entire community of Northern Ireland—all the people there—not on any particular category of people. He spoke about spending on education being flat, but there is actually a real-terms increase for education and health in the budget. I want to put that on the record.

The hon. Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) of course speaks from experience both on the Front Bench and in a previous life when he was involved in Northern Ireland matters. On his references to our being under direct rule, I want to make it absolutely clear that we are not. It is important to recognise that we have oversight at the moment, and it is our duty to ensure that there is proper governance. In pursuance of that duty, we are pushing through the legislation that is absolutely necessary to ensure good governance, which means proper public services. The money we are providing will ensure that those public services have the funding to go with them.

Owen Smith: I appreciate what the Minister has said, but will he explain to the House why the Government are so loth to move formally to having direct rule?

Mr Vara: The hon. Gentleman raises a very good point, and I will tell him why. The last time we moved to direct rule, it lasted five years, and the time before that, it lasted 25 years. The move towards direct rule is a lot easier than the move out of direct rule. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, along with the Prime Minister, will therefore leave no stone unturned in trying to get a functioning Assembly. We need to remember the history.

Nigel Dodds: I, too, appreciate what the Minister has said. He is trying to handle a very difficult situation. The last period of direct rule was five years, so how long—how many years—will he give for the current non-direct rule/non-devolution limbo?

Mr Vara: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. I do not know how long, but we are still trying to get the parties involved and we are engaging with them. We have the British-Irish intergovernmental conference coming up soon, and we are liaising with the Irish Government, as is necessary. We are not going to give up on this very easily, as I hope is abundantly clear. He will be aware that as we had the deep conversations earlier this year, it would not have been appropriate to move into new talks immediately. There needs to be a time for people to reflect, pause and come back with different thoughts.

The hon. Member for Belfast South (Emma Little Pengelly) spoke with care and consideration and gave moving examples. She mentioned the devolved Assembly, and she will have noted the comments I have just made.

I extend to the hon. Member for North Antrim (Ian Paisley) my deepest sympathies and condolences, and those of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, for William Dunlop and his family. While the passing of an individual is never easy, it is particularly difficult when there is a young family. We extend our deepest sympathies and best wishes to them all. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will personally extend our wishes to the family.

The hon. Gentleman spoke of the fantastic work done by the police and will have heard my comments to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead. Likewise, I noted the hon. Gentleman’s comments on the devolved Assembly.

To the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), I have to say that the hon. Member for Ealing North (Stephen Pound) intended a compliment, and that is how he should take it. The hon. Member for Strangford spoke with his customary commitment and spoke of his frustrations. I want to be clear that the Government are also frustrated that we cannot have the devolved Assembly up and running. Whenever my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are on our regular visits to Northern Ireland, the view comes out strong and clear that people want decision making. I therefore make this last plea to all concerned: think again and start taking those decisions.

Mr Gregory Campbell: The Minister compares the frustrations expressed by Democratic Unionist Members with the frustrations of the Northern Ireland Office, but does he understand the difference? We have done everything to try to accelerate the move towards devolved government and have had no reciprocity from Sinn Féin. The Minister can assuage his frustration and take action to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Vara: I hope that the commitment that the hon. Gentleman has articulated—others have articulated it—to that devolved Assembly will continue. For the Government’s part, we will continue to speak to other parties to see whether we can get the Assembly up and running.

The Government would very much have preferred this legislation to have been taken forward by the restored Executive and a sitting Assembly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I are disappointed that that is not the case. However, at this point, action cannot be delayed further. It is necessary to expedite the Bill to provide certainty on Northern Ireland finances, protect the delivery of public services and deliver on our responsibility to ensure good governance in Northern Ireland.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time; to stand committed to a Committee of the whole House (Order, this day).
Northern Ireland Budget (No. 2) Bill
Considered in Committee (Order, this day)

[DAME ROSIE WINTERTON in the Chair]

Clause 1

ISSUE OF SUM OUT OF THE CONSOLIDATED FUND FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2019 AND APPROPRIATION OF THAT SUM

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton): With this it will be convenient to consider:

Clauses 2 to 8 stand part.

Amendment 1, in schedule 1, page 13, line 19, after "offences" insert

"other than the prosecution of members and former members of the armed forces for murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide, or for attempt of those offences, if the alleged offence was committed—

(a) more than 20 years before the date of issue of proceedings; and

(b) when the accused person was subject to service law, or was a civilian under service discipline, and engaged in a UK peacekeeping operation; and

(c) if the alleged offence relates to events which took place in Northern Ireland and which have been the subject of an investigation by—

(i) a service police force or a UK police force, or

(ii) a coroner."

The intention of this amendment and the similar amendment to Schedule 2 is to remove prosecutions against current and former members of the armed forces for certain alleged offences committed during military operations or in similar circumstances from the ambit of authorised expenditure by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

That schedule 1 be the First schedule to the Bill.

Amendment 2, in schedule 2, page 27, line 33, after "offences" insert

"other than the prosecution of members and former members of the armed forces for murder, manslaughter or culpable homicide, or for attempt of those offences, if the alleged offence was committed—

(a) more than 20 years before the date of issue of proceedings; and

(b) when the accused person was subject to service law, or was a civilian under service discipline, and engaged in a UK peacekeeping operation; and

(c) if the alleged offence relates to events which took place in Northern Ireland and which have been the subject of an investigation by—

(i) a service police force or a UK police force, or

(ii) a coroner."

The intention of this amendment and the similar amendment to Schedule 1 is to remove prosecutions against current and former members of the armed forces for certain alleged offences committed during military operations or in similar circumstances from the ambit of authorised expenditure by the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland.

That schedule 2 be the Second schedule to the Bill.

8.49 pm

Sir Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks) (Con): I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for selecting the amendments. I want to say at once to our colleagues from Northern Ireland that I deliberately did not speak on Second Reading. They had some very important issues to raise on the budget and on decision making, but I hope they will understand that when it comes to this particular matter there is a UK issue at stake. Several hundred thousand British soldiers served in Northern Ireland throughout the troubles. The situation we are now confronted with raises issues that, while they are important to communities in Northern Ireland, go way beyond Northern Ireland.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): At the outset of this debate, I hope the right hon. Gentleman knows that Members on the Democratic Unionist party Benches absolutely salute the courage, the dedication and the record of servicemen from across all of the United Kingdom who gave of their time, their duty and, for too many, their lives in defence of Ulster. We salute them, sir, tonight.

Sir Michael Fallon: I am most grateful for that, and in particular for the tone in which it was expressed.

This is not just a UK issue, but it is a long-running UK issue. I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friends who have continued to raise it before the House: my right hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), who originally promoted a Bill on the subject, and many others who served in the Province and who have contributed to debates on this issue. Through this Bill we are quite rightly giving large sums of money—hundreds of millions of pounds—to the Northern Ireland Departments, including the judicial Departments, for “historical investigations and other legacy costs”.

I submit to the Committee that Parliament, even if there were no other concerns, would have every right to debate those sums, but there are other concerns here, which have been well articulated already in this Parliament.

Investigations under way in Northern Ireland are putting servicemen, servicewomen and police officers, whose duty it was to protect the public, almost on a par with terrorists who were content to murder and to maim. There cannot and should not be any moral equivalence between the two. It is now worse than that, however. We are now, through practice in Northern Ireland, discriminating against members of the security forces. Let me put it very simply: can it be morally right that a terrorist suspected of involvement in some of the worst atrocities, such as murdering four troopers in Hyde park and slaughtering their horses, should be given a letter of comfort guaranteeing immunity from prosecution, when those who have served the state to protect our people, in cases that have already been investigated, concluded and dismissed, are now seeing those cases reopened 30, 40 or more years after the event?

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that roughly 300 Northern Ireland veterans are fearful of the knock on the door. All the allegations were investigated fully at the time. What is worse is that under the PSNI inquiry they were reinvestigated about four years ago and most of the veterans were told that there was
[Sir Henry Bellingham] nothing further to worry about. Some have been rearrested in dawn raids, and a number have been charged with attempted murder. That breaks the military covenant and is a betrayal of our incredibly brave veterans.

Sir Michael Fallon: Absolutely, and some cases have been reopened more than once.

Nobody in this House would suggest that our troops should be exempt from investigation or prosecution for any kind of wrongdoing—of course not. Parliament itself requires, through the armed forces Acts, that any such allegation should be properly investigated by the service police. If there is new evidence concerning recent allegations, then of course they should be looked at. Equally, however, we cannot accept a situation where the whole process begins to be abused by cases simply being reopened for the sake of it, where there is not substantive new evidence. That was the case as allegations accumulated under the Iraq historical allegation apparatus, which was one reason why I shut it down as Defence Secretary and why, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence, I laid evidence before the Solicitors Disciplinary Tribunal, which eventually resulted in the key solicitor involved being struck off.

In Northern Ireland, the opposite is happening. Allegations of misconduct are being reopened 30 or 40 years later, when memories cannot be trusted and evidence may be hard to come by. Can a court really be sure 45 years after the events exactly what warning was shouted at two in the morning in a street in west Belfast in the early 1970s? These are the kinds of cases that are now being reopened, and I submit to the Committee that Parliament now needs to draw a line. The purpose of amendments 1 and 2 is to introduce a statute of limitations for the first time to say that cases more than—there can be different views on this, but this is what I have said in the amendment—20 years old, so from the date of the Good Friday agreement, cannot now be reopened if they have already been investigated.

Of course, a statute of limitations in itself raises complexities. I understand that. Many issues around it would need to be looked at. For example, we heard much in the previous debate about the bravery of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the police are not included in this amendment. I understand that there are some reservations about including them. There are complexities, but there is nothing unusual about a statute of limitations. In a previous debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts) reminded the House that there are statutes of limitation in commercial law: cases cannot be reopened when companies have dissolved and documents cannot be traced, and it is not possible to properly ascertain the change of responsibility, or rules and regulations from an earlier period no longer apply.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): As the right hon. Gentleman explained, the amendments apply only to the armed forces. I put on record my enormous, deep gratitude for the tremendous courage and sacrifice of all members of the armed forces who served in Northern Ireland—but so too did the members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, now the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I think the right hon. Gentleman has to explain to those many members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary—many more members, in fact—who are being investigated time and again in various forms in Northern Ireland why his amendments do not treat those in the police service with any equivalence this evening.

Sir Michael Fallon: I am very happy to accept that particular challenge. My amendment may well not be watertight. I understood that there were some reservations in the PSNI about a statute of limitations. That is one of the complexities.

There are other complexities: if we introduce a statute of limitations in Northern Ireland, why not introduce it elsewhere, where the British military is involved in other campaigns? I am sure that we will hear from the Secretary of State about other difficulties involving the European convention on human rights and so on, but the principle is that there should be some form of limitation. We cannot endlessly go back. Are we to reopen cases where it is alleged that Canadian or British troops shot prisoners out of hand in one of the more difficult days after the D-day landing? Should those cases be reopened? Nobody in this House would say yes. There must come a point when we have to draw a line.

Dr Andrew Murray (South West Wiltshire) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his amendments, but does he agree that we need to tread very carefully, as there are important principles of law here? Our armed forces do not want to be aside from or above the law; they uphold the law. Does he also agree that under the military covenant our armed forces must suffer no disadvantage—that is the test—but that in that important regard they are at a significant disadvantage under the law as it stands?

9 pm Sir Michael Fallon: I accept both those points. I made the first one myself—our armed forces are subject to armed forces legislation and no member of the armed forces would want any exemption for wrongdoing or misconduct—but the second point is the more important. As it stands, ex-servicemen and women—mainly servicemen—are being discriminated against by the process.

The Committee and the Government, if they will accept the amendment, or the spirit of it, have an opportunity to declare their will to Northern Ireland—to the judiciary in Northern Ireland, to the legal system in Northern Ireland, to some of the fee-hungry barristers in Northern Ireland—and to our own appeal courts here, that Parliament will no longer tolerate a situation where terrorist murderers are allowed to walk free while ex-servicemen, veterans who have put their lives on the line for the rest of us, fear a knock on the door and can be hauled from their beds, arrested, flown to Belfast, put into a cell and indicted for an offence that might or might not have been committed 30 or 40 years before. That cannot be right.

I make one final point: these ex-servicemen are not the generals or even the colonels who wrote the rules of engagement, planned the patrols and issued the orders, but the ordinary soldiers, the men of the platoons, who went out into the dark, into danger, on our behalf to face up to the terrorist challenge in Northern Ireland.

We owe it to them, one way or another, to say that enough is enough and that the hounding of our veterans must now stop. I look to the Government to tell the Committee how they propose to stop it.
Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): It is a huge privilege to follow the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), not least because, when Secretary of State for Defence, he seriously engaged with us on the Defence Select Committee when we conducted an inquiry into fatalities that arose during the troubles in Northern Ireland. He engaged with us and considered our report—we all on the Committee collectively and appropriately considered the issues at hand—and we can hear that he is one of the growing number of principled parliamentarians who recognise there is an issue that we need to address. He also fairly outlined some of the deficiencies in the amendments. I say that not as a criticism but drawing on comments he himself made.

Our report was very clear, in its second recommendation, that the Government should extend any proposal to the brave members of the RUC. We have heard many honeyed words this evening about the bravery and sacrifice of police officers, both past and present, and many Members have put forward their views on the noble cause that police officers served in our community in Northern Ireland, and yet, of course, they are absent from the amendments. There are various reasons for that. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the complexities, but the complexities applying to police officers past and present in Northern Ireland apply similarly to Army veterans. It is not the case that those complexities are confined to Army veterans in Northern Ireland or in the rest of Great Britain and do not apply to the police; they apply equally, and they are twofold. There should be no amnesty for terrorists, and there should be no equivalence between the honourable actions of service personnel and the actions of those who went out to commit murder and mayhem in our streets.

Many who have served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Police Service of Northern Ireland or the Army, and who live in Northern Ireland, will never countenance the day when their service is treated as if it were in any way comparable with what was done by those who sought to destroy our society, and I think that they are right. However, I recognise that dealing with that issue opens up another panoply of legal complexities.

The right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis)—the esteemed Chairman of the Defence Committee—and I have regular discussions about how we can obviate some of the legal constraints that apply to a statute of limitations. I think Members should take the opportunity to read the legal submissions from which our inquiry benefited—from Professor Richard Ekins of Oxford University, Professor Kieran McEvoy of Queen’s University Belfast, Professor Peter Rowe of Lancaster University, and Professor Phillepe Sands QC of University College London.

What can we take as an overarching lesson from the varied range of views that were expressed, which included disagreements? This Parliament is sovereign. This Parliament can set its laws, create the circumstances around natural justice, and outline what a criminal justice process should be. It can inject some equity and fairness into that process, in a way that complies with article 2 of the European convention on human rights, or article 3, in the case of torture. I think that the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks was right to refer, in his amendment, to previous satisfactory investigations. No one is trying to obviate the rules of natural justice in this country, but he is right to suggest that we should stand firm when, again or again or again, a knock comes at the door.

I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Newbury (Richard Benyon), to the hon. Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham) and to the former Member of Parliament for Aldershot, Sir Gerald Howarth, all of whom have been steadfast champions of the notion of protecting those who protected us.

We talk very loosely about 90% of all troubles-related killings being carried out by terrorists, with 10% attributed to state forces, but we can state categorically that each and every one of those that fall within the 90% were crimes, carried out by terrorists who were involved in state subversion. We cannot say that of the 10%. We cannot say that of those who put their lives on the line to protect all of us. We need only look across at that door to see three plaques in memories of three Members of this House who were cut down by terrorists in this country. We do not have to look too far away.

I know that memories fade, and I know that people talk about the price of peace. I do not remember any legal constraints or complexities being raised too strongly in the House in 1998, when the prisons were opened. I do not remember too many legal complexities bothering those boffins in Whitehall when they constructed the on-the-runs scheme. Time and time again in the pursuit of peace, to please those who tried to destroy this country, legal minds and successive Governments have created conditions that have allowed the doors to open for terrorists.

I praise the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks—and I say that meaningfully—as the principal parliamentarian to support this continual quest. He tabled the amendments in the knowledge that they were not perfect, and that this was a journey that we would have to make together in a committed and principled way. It is right for Parliament to set conditions that provide protection for those who protected us and who have no equivalence with those who tried to destroy this country, in a way that does not legally extend an amnesty or state immunity, because as a state we will have discharged our duty. We are talking about cases where there has been an investigation and where we are satisfied that the information gathered is exhaustive, and it is natural justice for those being prosecuted who served this country that we should move on.

I respond to the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks not to detract from the thrust of what he is attempting to achieve or the principled spirit of what he has outlined, but to stand at one with him in recognising that this is a wrong that needs to be righted, and that it cannot be constrained or confined to Northern Ireland alone; he has outlined the implications right across this country, and indeed in theatres beyond this country.

I hope that the spirit in which the right hon. Gentleman brought forward these amendments will continue to feature as we navigate the legal and moral complexities and do what is right, in the interests of our veterans, our current armed forces personnel, past and present, and those who served in the RUC, the PSNI and others. If we can get collective agreement tonight that that is our direction of travel and that is what we want to achieve, to the effect that we will be honourable and earnest in our quest to protect those who protected us, he will have our support.
The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Karen Bradley): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson); he is always a profound speaker. The spirit of the event captured the whole of the House today, and the whole Committee was, I think, enchanted by his contribution.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon). His time as Secretary of State for Defence was more than distinguished; he was an absolutely superb Defence Secretary. He stood up for the armed forces and the military in a way that few could, and I want to put on the record how much I enjoyed working with him. I was once his Whip, and he was quite difficult to whip. I have to say, because he was very determined in what he wanted to achieve, but we worked together very well and managed to get some significant changes to legislation through, and I enjoyed working with him immensely.

I also want to put it on the record that this Government will always salute the tremendous heroism and courage displayed by members of the armed forces and the Royal Ulster Constabulary throughout the troubles in Northern Ireland. Operation Banner was the longest continuous deployment in British military history, lasting from 1969 to 2007. During that period, over 250,000 people served, more than 7,000 medals for bravery were awarded, and the RUC was collectively awarded the George Cross for valour. As I said to the annual Police Federation for Northern Ireland conference in May, without the contribution of our armed forces and the RUC, and—in so many cases, their sacrifice—there would, quite simply, have been no peace process in Northern Ireland. For years, they stood between the rule of law and the descent into anarchy, and by their actions ensured that the future of Northern Ireland would only ever be determined by democracy and consent, never by violence. All of us in this House and beyond therefore owe them an enormous debt of gratitude, something we must never forget.

We remember the more than 1,100 members of the security services who were murdered, and the many thousands more who were maimed or injured, physically and mentally. And as this Government have always made clear, we will never accept any kind of moral equivalence between those terrorists who sought to destroy the rule of law and the security forces whose job it was to maintain the rule of law.

We will also continue to reject any attempt to rewrite the history of the troubles in order to justify or legitimise republican and loyalist terrorism. Let us not forget the bare facts: 60% of deaths in the troubles were caused by republican terrorists; 30% by loyalist terrorists; and just 10% by the state, and the vast majority of those were entirely lawful.

For most of the period of Operation Banner, the role of the armed forces was to support the civil power in maintaining the rule of law against the terrorist threat. Northern Ireland was not an armed conflict, and we should be careful in the language we use to describe what was happening in a part of our own country. In upholding the rule of law, the armed forces were at all times required to operate within it while being fully accountable to it. This is what set them apart from the terrorists, who operated outside the law.

As we know, in the vast majority of cases, members of the armed forces and the police carried out their duties with exemplary professionalism and restraint, often in the most provocative and dangerous of circumstances, yet, as with any deployment of this scale and duration, there were also mistakes. The Government have quite rightly apologised whenever the state or those acting for the state fell short of the high standards we expect, but I cannot emphasise enough that events like Bloody Sunday are not the defining story of Operation Banner, and those who served can rightly be proud of the role they played in ultimately bringing Northern Ireland to the much improved place that it is today.

I fully understand the concern expressed by Members of this House about the treatment of former service personnel in respect of Northern Ireland, and about the apparent disproportionate focus on their actions rather than on those of the terrorists. I also understand the continuing concerns being expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks over the issue of the so-called on-the-runs and the letters that were issued under the scheme introduced by the Labour Government.

Lady Hermon: Will the Secretary of State put on record the Government’s admiration for the integrity and independence of the judiciary in Northern Ireland? As she will know, its members were often targeted. Some of them were murdered and many were injured, yet despite all the threats and the violence, they continue to serve Northern Ireland independently and with great distinction.

Karen Bradley: The hon. Lady alludes to one of the points that I am going to make later on my concerns about the amendment, but I am very happy to put that on record. I have met members of the judiciary in Northern Ireland, and it is an extraordinary experience to visit the law courts in Belfast and to compare the protection around those courts with what we have in Great Britain, where people can enter the courts freely, attend the public galleries and be part of the judicial process. I have seen the levels of security that apply in Northern Ireland precisely because of the level of threat to members of the judiciary that she has mentioned.

I shall continue with my point about the so-called on-the-runs. I want to be clear that, whatever its shortcomings, the scheme never amounted to an amnesty or to immunity to prosecution. All that the letters issued at the time stated was whether an individual was still wanted by the police on the basis of the evidence available at the time. This was confirmed by the independent inquiry into the scheme carried out by Lady Justice Hallett in 2014. In the case of the alleged Hyde Park bomber, the problem was that he was given a letter in error stating that he was no longer wanted, when in fact he was wanted by the Metropolitan police. That enabled his defence to argue an abuse of process, which was upheld by the judge and caused the prosecution to be stayed. However, in responding to Lady Justice Hallett’s review, the then Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers), could not have been clearer when she said:

“If there is considered to be evidence or intelligence of their involvement in crime, they will be investigated by the police, and if
the evidence is sufficient to warrant prosecution they will be prosecuted."
—[Official Report, 9 September 2014; Vol. 585, c. 779.]

My right hon. Friend also made it very clear in 2014 that the scheme was now at an end.

The current imbalances are of course taking place under the current mechanisms for addressing the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past, over none of which the UK Government have any direct control. Indeed, there is widespread consensus that the current mechanisms in Northern Ireland are not working effectively for anyone—for veterans or for the victims of terrorism. That is why in 2014, after 11 weeks of discussions with the main Northern Ireland parties and, as appropriate, with the Irish Government, we brought forward proposals for new bodies, designed as set out in the Stormont House agreement. Significantly, during those talks there was no support for simply drawing a line under the past or for the introduction of amnesties for troubles-era offences, which, to comply with international law, would have had to apply to all sides.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): May I urge the Secretary of State to realise that the protagonists in this bitter debate are sometimes trapped by their own rhetoric? The truth of the matter is that one side wants there to be an amnesty for one group of people, but not the other, and the other side wants the reverse. If she likes, she can come to the conclusion that there is no support for a drawing of the line for everyone, or she could conclude that it is up to the Government to take a lead and draw the line for everyone in the knowledge that those who cannot speak out for that policy could nevertheless live with it.

Karen Bradley: My right hon. Friend feels strongly about this matter and has considered it in depth in his role as Chair of the Defence Committee, which has started a new piece of work on it. In my discussions with representatives of veterans and victims groups in Northern Ireland, the firm view that this was not the time for amnesties. I well understand and will discuss the steps that could be taken, but I caution him about his interpretation of the comments that he has heard. That was not what I saw with my own eyes or in the evidence that I have received, but I understand his view. We are consulting, which I will come on to in a moment, and I would welcome the Defence Committee’s views on the consultation. I am also happy to work with him on the inquiry that he has started.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: To echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) and for the sake of clarity, this debate is not between two sides that want an amnesty. For the record, the DUP does not support an amnesty for anyone connected with Northern Ireland. We do support a statute of limitations, which is not an amnesty. This House should never equate the men and women who stood on the frontline—I had the privilege of standing beside them—with those who skulked in the shadows. That is not what this debate is about.

Karen Bradley: The right hon. Gentleman has been a leader in this area for many years, and I pay tribute not only to his personal experience, but to his leadership on this matter and his role in the Stormont House agreement and other matters since. I also want to put on the record my thanks for his help and support when I was the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and he was the Northern Ireland representative on the first world war steering group. His leadership there has led to some magnificent and wonderful commemorations in Northern Ireland and a real bringing together of communities to recognise the sacrifices that were made 100 years. I had the privilege of being in northern France two weeks ago for the Somme commemoration—perhaps it was only last week, but it feels like a lifetime ago—which was a wonderful tribute to him and his work.

Dr Julian Lewis: Just for the sake of clarity, the Defence Committee has never used the word “amnesty” and has always used the phrase “statute of limitations”. However, the point I made earlier applies equally if that phrase is substituted for “amnesty”. One party, as it were, wants it for one side but not the other, and vice versa. It is disappointing that the Government’s response to the Committee’s report was originally going to have a special section in its consultation exercise to consider the possibility of a statute of limitations, but they went back on that pledge that had been given in writing in their response to our report.

Karen Bradley: I am of course happy to discuss the matter again with my right hon. Friend. He is absolutely right that the language and terminology that are used are incredibly important in this debate. With a statute of limitations, we tested this with political parties, victims groups, veterans groups and others in Northern Ireland. To be legal, there would have to be a statute of limitations on both sides, and it would have to include a proper process of reconciliation. We were unable to find representative bodies that were able to accept that as a conclusion. It would therefore have been misleading to put it as an alternative approach in the consultation document—I make it clear that this is on a specific consultation on setting up the institutions agreed at the Stormont House talks.

As set out in the Conservative party manifestos at the last two general elections, the Government believe that the proposed new legacy bodies provide a better way forward than the current mechanisms. They will address the legacy of the past in ways that are fair, balanced and proportionate and that do not unfairly focus on former members of the armed forces and the RUC. As I have said, we are now consulting on those bodies, and the consultation runs until 10 September. I encourage all right hon. and hon. Members with an interest in these matters to make their views known in the consultation. The House has my full assurance that all representations on this matter will be properly and carefully considered. As our manifesto at the last election stated clearly, any approach to the past must be fully consistent with the rule of law.

Earlier, my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary answered a question from my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Sir Henry Bellingham) by confirming that the Ministry of Defence has set up a dedicated team to look specifically at how this matter is addressed. We all want to make sure that those brave heroes who gave so much to defend us are treated properly with dignity and respect. It is right that the Ministry of Defence should look at this for the armed forces across the whole United Kingdom, not just in the Northern Ireland context.
The ongoing consultation is one reason why the Government are unable to accept the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks. First, it would be wrong to pre-empt the outcome of the consultation. Secondly, the Government do not believe this Bill is the right vehicle for such amendments. This is a Budget Bill designed to ensure that the necessary funding is available to ensure the continued delivery of public service in Northern Ireland. That touches on the point made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) about the independence of the judiciary. When we start looking at how the amendment would work and how the direction would happen, we see that it would impinge on the independence of the judiciary. Again, I am very nervous about starting to make such decisions in this House, although I well understand the sentiment behind the amendment and why my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks has posed the question.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally, the Government cannot accept the amendment because it would undermine the rule of law. The effect of the amendment would be to remove the ability of the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland to prosecute former soldiers for the next 12 months, even when new evidence came to light which the original investigation could not have considered and that the prosecution believed could lead to a conviction. Again, that goes to the point made by the hon. Member for North Down. This would significantly undermine the independence of the Director of Public Prosecutions for Northern Ireland and the exercise of the statutory functions of that office. Decisions made by the DPP are rightly based on available evidence, and it would be manifestly wrong for financial considerations to influence decision making, as proposed in the amendment. Although ultimately it would be for the courts to decide, the likelihood is that these amendments would be incompatible with our obligations under article 2. As such, should the amendment be made, I would be unable as Secretary of State to certify the Bill as compatible with convention rights for introduction to the other place.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): My right hon. Friend is explaining what the practical and legal obstacles to this amendment might be, including the operation of the European convention on human rights. If the Government concede that there is no moral equivalence between the actions of terrorists and the actions of the military, should not the application of the law also recognise that in some way? If this amendment is not possible, what other means might there be to ensure that brave members of the armed forces are not unnecessarily and wrongly pursued nearly a century later?

Karen Bradley: I do not wish to detain the Committee for significantly longer than I already have, but I suggest that I spend some time with my right hon. Friend explaining the thinking behind the Stormont House institutions and how we would get to a situation where there was not this disproportionate focus on the armed forces and law enforcement.

9.30 pm

At the moment, all but one of the coronial inquests being looked at by the Lord Chief Justice relate to former military and law enforcement personnel. We also have a police ombudsman, who looks at wrongdoings of police officers, and a PSNI legacy investigations unit. 30% of whose case load deals with killings by the military and law enforcement. That cannot be considered proportionate, given that only 10% of the killings during the troubles were by members of the military or law enforcement. It cannot be the case that only 70% of the investigations by the PSNI legacy investigations unit are looking at terrorist killings, all of which were crimes. We need to get that balance right. My right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), who chairs the Select Committee but was also a Minister in the Northern Ireland Office at the time of the Stormont House talks, has often spoken to me with great passion about how important it is that we redress this. The status quo is simply not acceptable. We are consulting on how the Stormont House institutions would make that better, but I would welcome representations from all hon. and right hon. Members in this Chamber to that consultation, so we can make sure we get this right.

As a Conservative who believes fundamentally in the rule of law, central to which is the independence of our prosecuting authorities, I believe that however well-intentioned the amendment from my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks, it leads us into some very dangerous territory. It would undermine and erode hard-won support for the criminal justice system within Northern Ireland. It would be used by those who wish to rewrite the history of the troubles to reinforce their claims that the UK Government has “something to hide” and is primarily concerned with covering up the actions of our armed forces. It will be seized upon by those who wish to portray the British state as the oppressor and the armed forces as human rights abusers—that is still language used by dissident republicans to boost recruitment today and who continue to pose a severe threat. It will create further uncertainty for those whose cases are currently before the courts, and it is not clear whether their cases would have to be adjourned to the end of the financial year. I regret to say that it will also simply play into the hands of those who wish to establish some moral equivalence between those who attacked the rule of law and those whose job it was to defend it.

I sympathise immensely with my right hon. Friend’s intentions, and I want to work with him to achieve the aims that he has set out so eloquently, but, for the reasons I have stated, I simply cannot support the amendment, and I urge him to withdraw it.

Tony Lloyd (Rochdale) (Lab): Let me begin where the Secretary of State ended, in saying that there can never be moral equivalence between the acts of the broad mass of those young men and women who were asked to serve in Northern Ireland at the behest of our society and those who instead sought to damage, maim and kill through the paramilitary groups of either side. As with other Members, I wish to pay tribute to those who served our nation. I wish also to follow the words of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) in recognising as well the important role of the RUC during the troubles.

I recognise the argument put forward by the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon), and he rightly was struck by and acted on the claims farming that he saw as a result of the situation in Iraq. However,
there is no equivalent that reads immediately across to the situation in Northern Ireland, and it is important to establish that, even though I recognise that his motives are honourable in what he proposes.

I again follow the Secretary of State's line in saying that there is currently a consultation on the historical inquiries, and it is important that that is allowed to take place and to go forward. It is important that we take the opportunities of the Stormont House agreement to move forward in the way that she outlined. In the debate on Second Reading, I said that we should make progress with exactly those kinds of institutional arrangements. It is important that we bring things to a rapid conclusion in the interests of victims on all sides.

The right hon. Member for Sevenoaks was challenged by the hon. Member for North Down on why the RUC/PSNI has been left out of the amendment. It is helpful to quote Mark Lindsay, the chair of the Police Federation for Northern Ireland, who says:

“Let me be clear: This organisation is totally opposed to any legislation which proposes an amnesty”—a loaded word—“for any crime. That’s any crime, whether committed by a police officer or terrorist from any side of the divide. Society must now decide, whether the solution is a political solution or a criminal justice solution.”

He goes on to say that it would be a “monstrous injustice” to his members were we to go down those lines. It is important that we listen to those words.

I met Mark Lindsay recently, and one point that he made to me was about the enormous importance of the Police Service of Northern Ireland having the trust of people across all communities. One way to damage that trust would be to open the PSNI up to the accusation that it somehow gained special treatment for its members, when the Police Federation for Northern Ireland does not want that kind of special treatment. That is important.

In response to the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), I should say that even the leader of the Democratic Unionist party, Arlene Foster, has expressed her own doubts about going down this road. She makes the point that the DUP has not been pushing for this as a party, and her concern is that it could lead to demands for a wider amnesty. That is important because, as the Secretary of State said, she has to sign off the legislation as compatible with the UK’s human rights obligations under international law—not things that we can change or arbitrate; things that we have signed up to as part of the UK’s global commitments. These are things that the UK signs up to as exemplars to be applied not just here in the United Kingdom but all around the world. They give us the freedom to criticise those who transgress human rights obligations. A strong body of opinion—I know this opinion was given to the Defence Committee—makes it clear that if the state is seen to act partially in a way that denies victims access to justice, it is transgressing its obligations under international law. In particular, if in doing that the state is seen to be partial and to be protecting state actors while not offering the same kind of procedure to others, the state is, in that partiality, accused of breaching its wider human rights obligation.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): The comments by the leader of my party were directed specifically at the legacy proposals for Northern Ireland. To legislate for a statute of limitations on the narrow ground of Northern Ireland would not in our opinion be appropriate, because it would exclude deployments in the Gulf war and Afghanistan. It needs to be done on a UK-wide basis. My party would be supportive on that basis, but not if it is exclusively about Northern Ireland, because that would open it up to the risk that it would be used by others to try to bring about an amnesty, which is not what it would be.

Tony Lloyd: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for that clarification, which leads me to begin to bring my remarks to a conclusion.

I stand strongly with the Secretary of State on the fact that the consultation process is already abroad. That consultation process now should be allowed to come to its full conclusion. That is the right way forward both for this House tonight and more generally for this country. In the context of Northern Ireland, it is important to take on board the right hon. Gentleman’s remarks that the possibility of seeing a wider amnesty will defeat the ambitions of victims of the violence during the troubles and those who were left bereaved by that violence. It could, of itself, allow off the hook those whom we would all want to see—even these years on—brought before our justice system and the courts. Within that, it is right and proper that the right hon. Member for Sevenoaks recognises the force of the argument that this is the wrong vehicle. It is the wrong occasion for this and it will almost certainly lead to the wrong kind of rules—temporary at very best. I do hope that he will consider very seriously whether this is the right approach on this occasion.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I believe some form of consensus is emerging that a statute of limitations might be the correct way forward, especially if it could be applied in a wider context than just the Northern Ireland scenario. I know that the Conservative manifesto at the last election talked about protecting troops from malicious charges such as had been posed most irresponsibly and on an industrial scale in relation to Iraq by invoking the law of armed conflict for future conflicts and ensuring that the criteria of the civil law could not be applied to them. That is where a problem might creep in in connection with Northern Ireland, because there is no way in which the law of armed conflict could be said to apply to that situation, which was internal to the United Kingdom.

We heard from the Secretary of State that, earlier today, the Defence Secretary made the very welcome announcement that a dedicated unit is being set up inside the Ministry of Defence to try to grip this problem, and I think that it will try to grip it at every level—not just for Northern Ireland, but for these wider conflicts. However, for this evening, I will obviously concentrate on the Northern Ireland situation. I wish to start by making brief reference to the report previously produced by the Defence Committee, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) in his very strong contribution to this debate a little while ago.

Our report entitled “Investigations into fatalities in Northern Ireland involving British military personnel”, HC 1064, was published on 26 April 2017. The Government response, HC 549, was published on 13 November 2017, and there was a Westminster Hall debate on these reports on 25 January 2018, all of which bear future study.
Dr Julian Lewis

The Defence Committee has put in our entire report as evidence under a covering letter to the consultation process that is going on.

Karen Bradley indicated assent.

Dr Lewis: I see the Secretary of State acknowledging that fact. She will know that the Defence Committee was particularly disappointed about something that I mentioned earlier in an intervention. In the Government’s response—the one that was published in November 2017—they reprinted two of our recommendations and it gave the following answer to them. The recommendations were as follows:

“It is clear from the experience of these legacy investigations that, unless a decision is taken to draw a line under all Troubles-related cases, without exception, they will continue to grind on for many years to come—up to half-a-century after the incidents occurred... Accordingly, we recommend the adoption of Option One—the enactment of a statute of limitations, covering all Troubles-related incidents, up to the signing of the 1998 Belfast Agreement, which involved former members of the Armed Forces. This should be coupled with the continuation and development of a truth recovery mechanism which would provide the best possible prospect of bereaved families finding out the facts, once no-one needed to fear being prosecuted.”

This is what might be termed the Nelson Mandela solution, which of course proved to be such a success in South Africa.

Lady Hermon: At the very beginning of the right hon. Gentleman’s contribution, he summarised what he felt was the attitude in the House, which was that there was a consensus on a statute of limitations in Northern Ireland. May I just say that I am not in that consensus? I do not support a statute of limitations in Northern Ireland. May I just say that I am not in that consensus? I do not support a statute of limitations in Northern Ireland for the armed forces alone. I would like the right hon. Gentleman to address the really critical question. There is a fundamental principle of the British legal system that no one is above the law. How would he reconcile the amendment to which he is speaking with that fundamental principle?

9.45 pm

Dr Lewis: I acknowledge the hon. Lady’s making her own position clear. I trust that, in the remarks that I am about to make, I will address precisely that point. It relates in particular to the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. If I fail to mention that later, I hope that the hon. Lady will leap up and remind me to do so. I just wish to continue with my theme for the moment, which is the Government’s initial response to the passages—the recommendations—that I just read out.

The Government said:

“While the Government believes that the most effective option to address Northern Ireland’s past is to implement the proposals set out in the Stormont House Agreement, the Government acknowledges that others have different views on the best way forward, including approaches such as that proposed by the Committee which do not involve recourse to the criminal justice system. As such, the Government intends to include within its forthcoming consultation on the draft Northern Ireland (Stormont House Agreement) Bill a section entitled ‘Alternative approaches to addressing the past’. This section of the consultation will discuss alternative ways forward and include a description of the Committee’s recommendation. The consultation will invite respondents to give their views on ‘the potential effectiveness and appropriateness of alternative approaches such as amnesties and a statute of limitations to address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past’. Following the consultation’s conclusion, the Government will consider all views carefully to inform next steps.”

Now, all I can say is that the Committee was greatly encouraged by that positive response, and we were then considerably discouraged by the fact—which may or may not be connected with the change in Secretary of State—that we subsequently found that the consultation was not going to include the section as described officially in the response to our report. That seemed to be a step backwards.

I have heard it said time and again—this evening and in previous debates on the subject—the rather obvious truth that there is no moral equivalence between terrorists or people accused of terrorist offences, and people accused of having committed offences when they were members of the armed forces or security forces trying to protect the people of Northern Ireland. As I said, that is an obvious truth; there is no moral equivalence. However, it can be argued—and I feel that it must be argued—that there is a legal equivalence, because everybody who is accused of a crime is, in a sense, equal before the law. But something strange and particularly happened in the context of Northern Ireland, and that was—this is where I come to the intervention of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon)—the passage of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998. If I understand the Act correctly, and I think I do, it means that nobody can serve more than a two-year sentence, no matter how heinous the crimes that they committed, in the context of the troubles in Northern Ireland, which presumably means that, in practice, no one will spend more than half that length of time—12 months—in jail. Whether it be a question of pursuing terrorists decades after the event or of trying to pursue security personnel or members of the armed forces decades after the event, at the end of that whole process, even if anybody is found guilty of a crime that would normally attract a life sentence, they will end up spending no more than 12 months in jail.

Sir Hugo Swire (East Devon) (Con): I am listening to my right hon. Friend’s argument very carefully. It is not just a question of how much time some of these accused former servicemen may spend in jail—it is about the question mark hanging over them in later life, and their fear that when they go back to court in Northern Ireland they will not be protected. They get all kinds of memories coming back, and feel very afraid. So in a sense, their sentence is already a life sentence while the current legislation continues.

Dr Lewis: I entirely agree with every syllable of what my right hon. and gallant Friend says. We are now in a perverse situation where people are being pursued decades after the event without any scintilla of a suggestion that new evidence has been found. They are put through this disproportionate and agonising process, and at the end of it, in the unlikely event that they were found guilty, any sentence that they served would in no way be proportionate to the crime. The whole process has been undermined, because while one might make a moral, political or legal case to pursue someone to the ends of time for a capital crime—a crime of murder—if one knows right at the beginning that at the end of that huge process they are going to serve only a derisory sentence, that has to call into question the legitimacy of the proceedings.
Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend have sympathy with my constituent, Dennis Hutchings, who is facing that situation as we speak today? My constituents who are under threat day in, day out of a knock at the door or a letter. Perhaps that letter will come to me: perhaps I am one of those people. I am probably one of the older ones who served back then. I went in 1976, and the forces that were out there—some were volunteers for the Ulster Defence Regiment, which my hon. and gallant Friend the Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) was serving in—were doing a fantastic job. The RUC was doing a fantastic job. At one stage, we had 10,000 soldiers putting their lives on the line in the Province to keep people safe.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): I, like my right hon. Friend, served out there, in ’75, and I recall serving in the Bogside when we used to have to accompany the RUC there; they would not go were the military not with them at the time, patrolling in the same area. We were dealing with circumstances that are very difficult for modern generations to understand. We had to do so under a very different set of rules, and my concern is exactly his: that we are now judging on the basis of a wholly different set of criteria.

Sir Mike Penning: My right hon. and gallant Friend understands this so well. It was not so much that the RUC could not cope, but the threat to them was so great that we had to patrol with them. I did not serve in Londonderry or Belfast, even though I have been accused of doing naughty things in Belfast by the IRA and Sinn Féin. I served in Monaghan, Keady and Middletown, where we were in the RUC post, sometimes with the RUC and sometimes on our own.

It was a very difficult time, but we were not conscripts. We were young people who volunteered to serve in our armed forces. When I joined up, I knew that I was going to Northern Ireland. Basically, every 18 months you would go to Northern Ireland if you were from an infantry regiment. We knew we were going to go, and we knew how difficult it was going to be, but—this is the big but—I expected those who sent us to look after us. I honestly feel at the moment that veterans, and not just those from my day, do not feel that this House did the right thing for us and for them. They passionately feel that we are letting them down.

If this evening’s debate is not the answer and these amendments are not the right ones, I say to colleagues around the Chamber—I am so disappointed that some of my Labour friends who served in the armed forces are not here for something so damn important—that the people who did the right thing for us and for Northern Ireland are flagrantly being let down, day in and day out. They are told there is another consultation, that the Commons should stand up for our veterans, and if we do not vote for that this evening, there is something seriously wrong.

10 pm

Sir Henry Bellingham (North West Norfolk) (Con): It is a great honour to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning), who made an extremely moving speech.
I plan to be brief, but I first want to thank the Secretary of State for Defence, who, in reply to my Question 1 this afternoon, said that he would set up a dedicated team at the Ministry of Defence to look at the situation of all veterans. I have sponsored two Adjournment debates on this subject, and I have also set up an informal parliamentary support group to look at the interests of veterans from all theatres.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon) on the way in which he moved his amendment. I underline the comments about his time as Defence Secretary, during which he worked tirelessly to try to stop some of this nonsense going on, particularly in respect of Iraq and Afghanistan. His amendments are a genuine attempt to try to move this debate forward and to propose a constructive suggestion.

I very much hope that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will do two things. First, I hope she will work with the Secretary of State for Defence to make sure that the unit being set up really starts to make a difference. Secondly, the consultation that she set up did not actually say anything about looking at a statute of limitations. She mentioned the word “amnesty”, but, as the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson) made very clear, we are talking about an amnesty, but not a statute of limitations. She mentioned the word “amnesty”, but not a statute of limitations. In this case it would affect Northern Ireland, but I would extend it to all veterans from all theatres so that they knew where they stood and that, after a period of time, it would not be possible for them to be subject to the knock on the door. The qualification would of course be that any new evidence became available.

Sir Hugo Swire: Would my right hon. Friend not say that all veterans who find themselves in such a position today, tomorrow or in years to come should be looked after properly by the Ministry of Defence—provided with support, including if necessary counselling, and with security and an escort, particularly if they are going back to zones in which they are accused of committing these crimes—so that they do not feel they are not wanted, and do not feel isolated and forgotten?

Sir Henry Bellingham: My right hon. Friend is 100% right on that point, but we hope very much that there will not be any prosecutions in the future, or any further arrests.

The key point is that our security forces, as has been pointed out, served in Northern Ireland with the utmost professionalism and dedication in an incredibly febrile, tense and dangerous atmosphere. Young soldiers were sent over—volunteers; we are talking not about conscripts, but professional soldiers—and they were the envy of the entire world. Does the Secretary of State believe that any other army from any other country in the world would have shown the sort of restraint that our Army showed in Northern Ireland, as indeed did the police?

Some 10% of the killings in Northern Ireland were carried out either by the police or the security forces. That is a staggering figure. One has to bear in mind that every single case was fully investigated. Soldiers were operating under the law of the land—not under armed forces law under the Geneva convention, but under our own law—with the yellow book or the yellow card, and every instance was fully investigated at the time by the military police, the RUC or other authorities. That compares with the terrorists, who operated under no known code, and whose only aim in life was to kill and to maim, so how can there ever be any equivalence? How can we talk about amnesties, when our armed forces were operating under the rule of law and under the law?

I want to refer quickly to two cases. I will not mention the names, because they may well be sub judice, but I want to illustrate my concerns. First, the leader of a small patrol went into a village after a shooting incident the day before. The platoon had come under fire. A small patrol of four soldiers went into the village in a follow-up operation after an arms find. A suspicious individual was challenged but did not respond. All four members of the patrol opened fire and that person was killed. It was actually a tragic case of mistaken identity. It was fully investigated at the time by the military police and the RUC. All the evidence was pulled together. The rifles and the rounds were subject to forensic examination. After a period of months, all four members of the patrol were completely exonerated and no further action was required or taken.

We fast-forward to 2012. Under the PSNI investigation under the Historical Enquiries Team, the corporal major who had commanded that patrol was asked to go to Northern Ireland to be questioned, which he did. It was explained to him that there was no new evidence and that the existing evidence had disappeared—the rifles had long since been thrown away or whatever, and the forensic evidence was no longer available. After four days of very polite questioning, he was told that there would be no case to answer. He asked whether he could get on with his life and go back to his family and was told that he could. Fast-forward three more years and there was a knock on the door. Eighteen officers arrested him and took him to Northern Ireland. He has now been charged with attempted murder—I will not go into any more details because he has been charged.

I went to a veterans dinner last weekend at the Royal Anglian Regiment. There were more than 100 people at the dinner. Every single person who came up to me said, “What is going on? Can we not do something about this? Many of us live in fear.” In a speech given that evening, a former regimental sergeant major gave an example from Londonderry in 1972 that illustrates the difficulties that our soldiers faced, the fear they were up against and the appalling decisions that had to be taken on the spur of the moment.

In this second case, soldiers went into the crowd to snatch a demonstrator who had been throwing rocks and bricks at the police and soldiers. They snatched the demonstrator and the crowd became inflamed. The company of soldiers turned around and started moving backwards. One of the soldiers was hit on the back of the head by a rock. In those days, the helmets were not as effective as they are now and he fell down with a cracked skull. The crowd surged forward and were about to lynch him. My constituent and four other soldiers opened fire on the crowd and killed an individual. That was fully investigated at the time. It was found that they were operating under the yellow card or yellow book but that incident is now being reinvestigated. No fewer than 10 people at that dinner now fear they are
among the 284 Northern Ireland veterans, men in their 70s and 80s, who may well get the knock on the door as my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks said.

Sir Jeffrey M. Donaldson: I commend the hon. Gentleman for what he is sharing with us, which is the reality of the situation. Does he agree, however, that it is not just about the veterans attending that dinner? It is about the young men and women who are looking in on what is happening, considering joining our armed forces and doing what many of us have done in the past—stepping up to the plate and serving the flag and the country. Might they just think again about serving this country if there is a prospect that they might face prosecution if they seek to defend themselves, the public and their comrades?

Sir Henry Bellingham: I thank my right hon. Friend—I will call him a Friend—who makes an incredibly important point. At that dinner, a number of former members of the Royal Anglian Regiment made the point that they were trying to encourage and recruit young people. Can they really do that when those people might go into a theatre of war and act in accordance with orders, the law of armed conflict or the law of the land, but be arrested many years hence?

I do not know what the answer to this dilemma is, but I do know that very many people out there are incredibly angry and very worried, and they are looking to this Government to come up with constructive, innovative and workable solutions. If we do not do that, we will not be forgiven in a hurry.

Johnny Mercer (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): Thank you, Sir Lindsay, for calling me in this debate. This is a deeply personal issue on which I have worked for some time. I welcome the amendments tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Sir Michael Fallon).

I am cognisant of the fact that there are real issues with what has been put forward—I do not dispute that for a minute—but I echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) said. If I was still a soldier watching this place, or if I was a veteran watching this place, I could not help but go away thinking that this place still—simply—simply does not get it when it comes to what we owe those who have served.

This issue is nothing to do with some of the things that have been mentioned tonight. There has been a crassness to the terminology at times. I in no way speak of the Chair of the Defence Committee, because we have been tumbling around these terms and I would understand that from him, but there is the idea that we have conflated the idea of an amnesty with that of a statute of limitations. They are fundamentally and critically different, yet they have been interposed as if this is some sort of game or legal language that we have to get around to ensure we do right by our servicemen and women.

Mr Mark Francois (Rayleigh and Wickford) (Con): I apologise for intervening because, characteristically, my hon. Friend is making a very good speech. We serve together on the Defence Committee, which is now looking into this matter. We heard at today's Defence questions that the Ministry of Defence is now looking into this matter, too. Does he agree that we are not going to give up on this? We are going to keep coming back debate after debate after debate, and we are going to try to harry the Government, on behalf of the veterans, until they do the right thing and provide protection for those who protected us.

Johnny Mercer: I thank my right hon. Friend for his intervention. I must say that when I started the process on IHAT, I found it a pretty lonely experience. That has now changed significantly. There are people in the Chamber who have campaigned on the Northern Ireland issue for a long time and it is deeply heartening to see the support this issue has got, certainly among Conservative Members. I thank him and others who have been here for much longer than me who have provided me with that support; vice versa, I have given any support that I have been able to give.

The problems with this process are so well known. It is late and I do not want to send everyone to sleep by giving them a lot of detail, but this process does not work for anybody. It does not work for the soldiers who are being investigated or for the families in finding out what has happened. The idea that it does is, I am afraid, for the birds.

Before I came to this place—I have spoken about it before, so this will not be a shock to anyone—I really struggled with the inauthenticity I saw from both the Government and Opposition Dispatch Boxes. Incidents such as the one that has just been referred to serve to highlight that. Up and down the country, there are people watching this who are veterans of Northern Ireland, of Afghanistan, like me, and of Iraq. They will be thinking, “Have these guys got my back? Do they really get it when they can’t even get the terms right? Does that give me the confidence that the Government will apply themselves to ending this ridiculous charade of prosecuting our soldiers? I'm afraid it does not.”

What happens to the amendments after I have finished speaking is up to my right hon. Friend. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks, but I have to lodge again my profound and personal disquiet with the Government’s policy. I feel a personal shame with regard to the historical allegations issue. I feel that I am part of a Government who are essentially promoting a cowards’ charter when it comes to looking after our servicemen and women. My right hon. Friend talked about how he made a political decision to close the Iraq Historical Allegations Team. I worked on that issue for a year before he did that. Every single civil servant and lawyer in his Department told him it could not be done, but he took the executive political decision that he was elected to make and closed it. We need some of that political courage to be brought to the issue in relation to Northern Ireland.

10.15 pm

We have heard from other hon. Members who have been to veterans’ dinners and so on, and I find it very difficult at the moment to see some of my old friends. They often asked me after IHAT when I thought that
Like my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer), I welcome today’s initiative by the Ministry of Defence and the consultation to which the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland referred, but I would give her this warning, which echoes what has been said in the debate: the House will not now rest on this matter. She said that the Bill was the wrong vehicle, and that might well be the case, but it is for the Government now to find the right vehicle so that we act on the views expressed tonight and see, finally, that justice is done for those who served to protect us.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause 1 accordingly ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 2 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 to 2 agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Bill read the Third time and passed.

CIVIL PARTNERSHIPS, MARRIAGES AND DEATHS (REGISTRATION ETC.) BILL (MONEY)

Queen’s recommendation signified.

Resolved,

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided.—(Jo Churchill.)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

Ordered,

That Martyn Day be discharged as a member of the Public Accounts Commission under section 2(2)(c) of the National Audit Act 1983, and that Douglas Chapman be appointed.—(Paul Maynard.)

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): With the leave of the House, I will put motions 5 to 8 together.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Regulated Activities) (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 9 May, be approved.

BANKS AND BANKING

That the draft Electronic Presentment of Instruments (Evidence of Payment and Compensation for Loss) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 30 April, be approved.

SOCIAL WORK

That the draft Social Workers Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.
Companies

That the draft Companies (Miscellaneous Reporting) Regulations 2018, which were laid before this House on 11 June, be approved.—[Jo Churchill.]  
Question agreed to.  
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)).

ELECTRICITY

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.—(Jo Churchill.)  
The Deputy Speaker’s opinion as to the decision of the Question being challenged, the Division was deferred until Wednesday 9 July (Standing Order No. 41A).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE (10 JULY)

Ordered,  
That, at the sitting on Tuesday 10 July, paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments) shall apply to the Motion in the name of Sir Vince Cable as if the day were an Opposition Day; proceedings on the Motion may continue, though opposed, for three hours and shall then lapse if not previously disposed of; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(Jo Churchill.)

COMMITTEES

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

That Douglas Chapman be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and Martyn Day be added.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

That Martyn Day be discharged from the Committee of Public Accounts and Douglas Chapman be added.—(Bill Wiggin, on behalf of the Selection Committee.)

PETITIONS

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

10.23 pm

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): I rise to present the petition of residents of Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland,

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of North Herefordshire constituency.

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): I rise to present a petition signed by Suzie Goodfellow and 63 other residents of Manchester, Withington, in the same terms and expressing the same concerns as that presented by the hon. Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke). I also present a petition on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) on the same subject, which is signed by 46 residents of his constituency. The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of Manchester, Withington.

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

Bill Wiggin (North Herefordshire) (Con): I am proud to present a petition from residents of North Herefordshire regarding home education. The petition states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of North Herefordshire.

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]

[Jo Churchill.]
The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I rise to present a petition on behalf of 15 residents of New Forest East, led by Diana and Richard Edwin. Its terms are similar to those of the petitions that have already been presented on this topic. It states:

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I rise to present a petition whose terms are similar to those of the petitions presented by my hon. Friends the Members for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke) and for North Herefordshire (Bill Wiggin), my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), and the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Jeff Smith).

Following is the full text of the petition:

[The petition of residents of the United Kingdom, Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.]
Parks (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

10.28 pm

Gill Furniss (Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): Even amidst the most built-up cities, we are blessed with parks and pockets of green space. Those spaces improve air quality, lower temperatures near congested cities and even harbour wildlife, but they are also the lifeblood of our communities. As we face an obesity crisis and concerns over public health, parks offer free and accessible opportunities for exercise and enjoyment. At a time when families are living in ever more cramped conditions and unsuitable housing, parks provide a much-needed environment in which children without access to other opportunities can enjoy being children. In an era of extreme loneliness and isolation, they are bringing people of all ages together, and in an age of unprecedented privatisation and commercialisation of public space, they remain free for everyone to use and benefit from.

According to the indices of multiple deprivation, my constituency is one of the most deprived in the country. Government figures suggest that we might expect to see far fewer parks and open spaces in such areas than in wealthier areas. However, Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough, despite its legacy as a highly urban formerly industrial area, is an exception to this, having substantial areas of parks and open space across the constituency. Sheffield can lay claim to being the greenest city in Europe, with a third of our city boundary lying within the Peak district and a history of prestigious prizes won, including the 2005 Entente Florale gold medal. We are blessed with hundreds of parks and open spaces, and residents have access to a huge range of facilities, from small play parks to ancient woodlands. The National Trust funded research in 2016 on Sheffield’s parks, which highlighted the huge value and benefit they hold for local people and the financial value that they represent to health and other public services.

I did not call this debate to bemoan a lack of parks for my constituents, nor are parks facing any kind of crisis of usership, with the city council reporting significantly increased numbers of park visitors in recent years. Last year, the Communities and Local Government Committee produced an excellent report on public parks. I agree with the thrust of its recommendations, as indeed do the Government, and hope that these can help improve parks nationwide. However, I wish to bring attention to the challenges of maintaining parks after years of austerity and the problems that having large parks alongside significant local deprivation can have.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Lady for giving way; I sought her permission to intervene beforehand. My constituency of Strangford is an area of outstanding natural beauty, which is wonderful. Does she agree that, whatever the increasing need for housing and facilities, we must ensure that parks are protected and enhanced, for they surely enhance quality of life and benefit all in our communities?

Gill Furniss: I completely agree and will say more about that as I continue.

The additional issues I have mentioned are often worsened by the funding shortfall. Since 2010, Sheffield City Council has suffered a staggering £430 million a year in cuts. The council looks after the vast majority of parks and open space in my constituency, but its maintenance of them is not a statutory duty. This contrasts with the situation for libraries; like parks, they are vital for young people’s development and enjoyment, but councils have a statutory duty to provide them. As councils have to make their Government-imposed cuts, parks and open spaces are of course facing drastically reduced spending.

In 2010-11, £40 million of Sheffield council’s £1 billion services budget was allocated for parks, sports and open-space facilities. This year around £30 million is budgeted. That is a real-terms cut of over 40%. That reduction is even more difficult to sustain as the council has not closed a single park in this time; maintenance has simply become incredibly stretched.

Sheffield’s parks funding cut is severe, but Sheffield has kept parks spending at a higher level than some comparable authorities. In recent months, there has been significant coverage of councils taking decisions to reduce parks spending even more drastically. It is not for me to criticise authorities who have utterly unenviable spending choices after years of cuts; however, I am glad that Sheffield has chosen to keep parks as a spending priority even under such difficult conditions. Figures from the National Trust’s research suggested that in Sheffield the savings from health and wellbeing benefits far outweighed the money spent. This is yet another example where cuts that councils have had no choice but to make have ended up costing far more down the line.

Turning to the impact of these cuts, like all Members, I get feedback from casework and constituency visits on the state of our parks, but this is inevitably a partial picture. To inform tonight’s debate, I launched an online survey for local park users. This is not scientific standard research, but I received 260 responses from local people and it has given a fascinating view of people’s thoughts and concerns.

It is concerning that nearly 40% of people feel park maintenance has declined over the past 10 years, but this is perhaps inevitable with the cuts that have been faced. More importantly, a quarter of respondents felt that the state of their parks was not acceptable. The council acknowledges that less than half the green space in my constituency meets the Sheffield standard—that it has been assessed as safe, clean and welcoming. This represents a divide in some parts of the city, which I will address shortly. Parks assessed as achieving the Sheffield standard represent up to 80% of the total number.

There still are basic maintenance budgets to cover upkeep, but the standards have inevitably been reduced for grass cutting and horticultural work. Alternative plans such as keeping some areas with longer grass with wildflowers are prominent in parks across my constituency. Alongside the general reduction in budget and the resulting challenge to general maintenance, council parks officers identify major problems in maintaining high-quality parks. One is the lack of money to replace equipment and facilities in parks and to regenerate more severely run down parks, and I will address this point later. No doubt parks nationwide suffer from this.
A second major issue is that of antisocial behaviour. Countless studies in recent years have shown that more deprived areas bear the brunt of antisocial behaviour, and police figures from my constituency unfortunately confirm this. We also know that local authorities such as Sheffield, which have higher overall levels of deprivation, have suffered disproportionate cuts. Antisocial behaviour gives councils a significant problem when looking after parks today. Many of our parks suffer frequent damage of all kinds, with issues ranging from motorbikers riding over the grass to bin fires. Many of the parks have no working swings for local children, with replacement swings delayed or sometimes shelved until the antisocial behaviour decreases.

These incidents serve to make our parks less safe, and, put simply, the budget of the Sheffield City Council parks department cannot cover the frequent repair and maintenance associated with higher levels of misuse. This is deeply unfair on the vast majority of people who use their local parks responsibly and are deeply proud of them. To give an example, residents recently expressed concern about the state of Longley park, a large local park that many residents feel is not being kept in the state that they expect or have been promised. It is very close to where I grew up, so it holds a special place in my heart. At one time during my childhood, it boasted an outdoor swimming pool, which is a rare thing these days. It was partly the concerns expressed to me and to the local paper that crystallised my thinking about the need for this Adjournment debate.

Longley park is a prime example of antisocial behaviour affecting people's enjoyment of their parks. It is a large park but it lies in a wider area of deprivation. It also has a difficult geography, in that large parts of it are not overlooked, making antisocial behaviour more prevalent. In my survey, one constituent who lives close to the park said:

“\[I don’t feel comfortable spending much time in it. Most times it has kids on motorbikes going round the paths which means you have to walk with dogs and kids on grass that hasn’t been cut and is full of dog waste.\]”

As people see their local park looking less well kept, less care is generally taken to respect the space. This situation is not a major problem for every park, but where it is, it really is a vicious circle.

The answer is not simple. The problem is a consequence of the general slashing of local government and community policing budgets. In common with all Labour Members, I have long been concerned and vocal about cuts across the board, but parks embody the problem of the effects of cuts multiplying. One concern expressed locally and in my survey was that parks in other parts of the city received more maintenance compared with local parks in my constituency. Although that is not the case, the damage caused to many of our local parks can make it appear to be the reality.

The additional maintenance needed for parks in deprived areas is not the only concern. There are myriad other issues as well. It is more difficult to sustain commercial activity such as events, funfairs or cafes in poorer areas, so there is less additional income to invest, compared with parks in wealthier areas. Facilities such as cafes can also mean that staff are regularly in a park to deter and report antisocial behaviour and other problems. I am positive about the plans that the council is making to bring more facilities and income to the largest parks in my constituency, but the income in parks in the wealthier parks of Sheffield has meant that, with some exceptions, they will always receive more in additional income to assist their maintenance.

As I mentioned earlier, councils across the country are struggling to fund upgrades and replacements for park facilities that are reaching end of life, particularly to play equipment, which is notoriously expensive. If not replaced, the equipment becomes dangerous, more easily broken and less attractive to use. Where parks have faced high levels of misuse, replacements are not only needed sooner, but parks officers rightly look to replace damaged equipment and structures with more resilient items. With the decimation of council capital budgets and concerns about the sustainibility of lottery funding—an incredibly important source of funding for park upgrades—parks face a maintenance crisis. The ending last year of “Parks for People”, the largest lottery funding pot for parks, leaves the future uncertain at best.

We have brilliant friends’ groups in our parks and open spaces that devote time and energy to maintaining and improving the places they, and we, value so much, and I place on the record my thanks to the many groups in my patch. I am pleased to have been as supportive as possible to as many of these groups at their events. In some cases, such as at the wonderful Wardsend cemetery, volunteers have taken the lead role in restoring a precious historic green space, but, again, volunteers disproportionately benefit parks in more affluent areas.

It is a simple fact that in many parts of my constituency there are fewer people who can spare the time to volunteer, which makes it harder to gather people together to sustain the friends’ groups that can make long-term improvements to a park.

Jim Shannon: Does the hon. Lady accept that councils also have a responsibility for health and safety? Roundabouts, swings and so on must be maintained, but councils must also deal with dog owners and dog waste. Both issues need to be addressed to make a park accessible and safe for everyone.

Gill Furniss: I absolutely agree. That is the thrust of my speech tonight, and I have already detailed the effects of cuts to budgets for policing and public services.

It would be easy to ask the Minister to consider making parks statutory services, so that councils could be held to account more easily for their maintenance. However, my local parks would not be helped one bit by that without the Government backing up the change with serious funding for local authorities to meet this requirement. Labour and the Conservatives have different views about local authority funding, and I do not think that we will resolve this difference tonight. As much as local authorities can innovate in developing and maintaining parks, it appears to be an unfortunate truth that there will always be higher costs. I ask the Minister specifically to ensure that councils have enough capital funds to create parks that are resilient to the challenges they can face. I also ask him to work with the Minister for Sport to ensure that lottery funds specifically support parks facing difficulties with misuse and the lack of commercial income that I have outlined. As welcome as the “Parks for People” programme was, its focus on heritage meant that parks in the most challenging areas sometimes lost out in favour of parks in traditionally leafier suburbs.
I thank Members and the Minister for attending tonight. I also thank local people, interested organisations and local parks officers who all offered a wealth of information, so much of which I could not touch on tonight. I hope that I can make a small contribution to ensuring that we have resilient parks and green spaces in every part of my constituency and in every city. Maintaining and improving parks for every citizen is an absolute necessity if we want to create a more equal, healthy and happy society.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough (Gill Furniss) on securing this debate and on her passion for her constituency and its parks. That passion shone through her speech. I am grateful to her for highlighting some important issues and sharing her experiences of the huge benefits that local green spaces bring to lives of so many.

I recognise the ambition of local councils, working together with their communities and Government, to preserve good-quality parks and green spaces now and for future generations. The Government are committed to ensuring that our parks and open spaces continue to provide vibrant and inclusive places for local communities to enjoy. Local parks are great at connecting communities and encouraging interaction between younger and older generations and between people from different backgrounds.

I recognise that to achieve that shared goal we need to support local councils to deliver it, so it may be helpful if I set out what the Government are doing to support the hon. Lady’s local area and, more broadly, if I touch on some of the activity the Government are undertaking to safeguard parks and open spaces.

On overall funding for local government, this Government believe strongly that local people who know and understand their community are best placed to decide how funding should be spent in their area. The locally funded element of the local government finance settlement is largely not ring-fenced, as it allows local authorities, which are independent of central Government, to manage their budgets in line with local priorities. In practice, that means there is no specific funding stream for parks, just as there is not for waste services or children’s services, for example. Local communities are best placed to decide on their own local priorities.

I pay tribute to the many local authorities that have done a fantastic job over the past few years to continue delivering high-quality services, from improving adult social care to maintaining our roads, public spaces and parks in what has been, for some, a difficult financial climate. The most recent local government finance settlement, announced earlier this year, provided a £1.3 billion increase in resources to local government over the next two years, taking the total to £45.6 billion in the forthcoming financial year. Of this, Sheffield will be able to access more than £1.2 billion between 2017 and 2020 to spend on all its important local services, including its parks. I am pleased to say that this year Sheffield will see a real-terms increase in the core spending power available to its council.

In addition to funding from the settlement, the current business rates retention scheme is also yielding strong results, and it is warmly welcomed by local authorities across the country. Sheffield itself estimates that, in this financial year, it will keep just shy of £5 million in business rates growth. All in all, there are significant financial resources that Sheffield can decide how to spend among its various priorities.

There are many local authorities across the length and breadth of our country that are doing great things at local level and exploring new and innovative approaches to attracting funding and reinventing park management. I recently had the pleasure of addressing the Local Government Association’s “Action on Parks” conference, and I was hugely impressed by the great examples of local authorities working collaboratively with local communities, health bodies and academics to explore new approaches to joining up services to realise the benefits for parks.

The truth is that there is no single answer to achieving good-quality green spaces. An example of the excellent work that local authorities are doing to help raise the quality of parks is participation in the green flag award scheme, which recognises a high standard of parks and green spaces. The scheme is owned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and operated under licence by Keep Britain Tidy. A record 1,500 green flags were awarded last year, illustrating the scheme’s success. We are seeing ambitious local councils striving to achieve green flag status for more of their local parks, and I am pleased to say that Sheffield is among the leaders, with 13 local green flag award-winning parks.

Furthermore, Sheffield is embracing opportunities for attracting new funding. Since 1996 the council has received £13.7 million of Heritage Lottery Fund grant investment for its various parks, which includes fantastic support for the botanical gardens and Weston Park.

In 2014 the innovative “Rethinking Parks” programme, delivered by the Heritage Lottery Fund and the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, awarded £100,000 to support two new projects in Sheffield to develop new ways to fund and manage parks. Since 2010, Sport England has invested just shy of £1 million in 30 grassroots sports projects across the city, including a £65,000 award to Wisewood Juniors football club to improve its football pitches.

However, no one size fits all. For example, Newcastle is a pioneer in exploring an innovative charitable trust model for its parks in conjunction with the National Trust, and Sheffield has also looked at that in the past. That model has the potential to make it easier to raise outside funding from social investment and businesses; to ring-fence budgets; to focus on a single objective of the parks in question; and to mobilise volunteers.

I am pleased that the Government have already taken steps to support improvements to our local parks and green spaces. We heard about the Communities and Local Government Committee’s excellent report—I agree with the hon. Lady that it was fantastic. In response, the Government created the parks action group, which is a testament to the importance we place on government at all levels coming together with the sector to identify the right solutions to the various issues she has presented this evening. I would like to give my personal thanks to the membership of the parks action group, who have worked tirelessly to explore some of these issues. Its membership is a veritable “Who’s Who” of the sector, and includes excellent organisations such as Fields in Trust.
Natural England, Groundwork, Keep Britain Tidy, the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, the Association for Public Service Excellence and many others. The group has begun to develop some key programmes of work, which will be supported by half a million pounds that the Government have committed to support its work.

That activity will support the delivery on six priority workstreams, which touch on some of the topics that the hon. Lady raised: exploring the funding landscape and proposing solutions; setting parks and green space standards; sharing a vision for parks and green spaces; empowering local communities; increasing knowledge and building skills, and increasing usage by all. I look forward to sharing more details on the work that the group will undertake to better secure the future of parks. I will provide an update to the Select Committee later this year, but I expect to be able to set out the programme of work in more detail in the coming months.

I wish to address the question from the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) about the planning framework. I am pleased to tell him that the national planning policy framework offers protection to all recreational facilities, including parks. The framework is clear that recreational land should not be built on unless an assessment has been carried out and has shown clearly that a park is surplus to requirements or that the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location.

Lastly, I wish to deal with the point the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside and Hillsborough raised about access to parks in a deprived area. She makes an important point, and one that I am keen to ensure becomes a reality as the parks action group carries on its work. She will be pleased to know that there was a previous programme called the “pocket parks” programme, whereby the Department funded £1 million-worth of small parks and almost 90 were created up and down the country. Ensuring access in deprived areas is a high priority for allocating that funding. I will be pleased to start looking through the results of that work to ensure that the money found its way to the right places, so we can use that work in formulating future plans in the parks action group.

Again, I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate and for ensuring that the value of parks is recognised. I pay tribute to local councils up and down the country for the hard work and dedication they put into parks. As we have heard, parks are often at the heart of our communities and are the space where families and local communities come together. I believe we have a shared vision of providing good-quality open spaces for our local communities, and I firmly believe that by working together we can build a better future for our green spaces.

Question put and agreed to.

10.53 pm

House adjourned.
House of Commons

Tuesday 10 July 2018

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[Mr Speaker in the Chair]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

University of London Bill [Lords]
Second Reading opposed and deferred until Tuesday 17 July (Standing Order No. 20).

Oral Answers to Questions

JUSTICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Offenders’ Access to Education and Employment

1. Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to improve offenders’ access to education and employment. [906347]

3. Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): What steps the Government is taking to improve offenders’ access to education and employment. [906349]

10. Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps the Government is taking to improve offenders’ access to education and employment. [906356]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Gauke): Reoffending costs society around £15 billion a year. We must support people’s rehabilitation through education and employment opportunities, both when serving their sentence and after. We launched the education and employment strategy in May, and our reforms will empower governors to commission bespoke, innovative education provision that meets the needs of their prisoners and links to employment opportunities on release. Our reforms will also engage and persuade employers to take on ex-prisoners via the New Futures Network. We have consulted governors and employers on proposals to increase the use of release on temporary licence to enhance employment opportunities.

Jeremy Quin: May I press the Secretary of State on the release on temporary licence scheme? What are the measures of success? How useful has it been in getting prisoners out of prison and into full-time employment on an ongoing basis?

Mr Gauke: It is useful, but I want us to do more of it. The education and employment strategy seeks to expand the use of workplace release on temporary licence—

ROTTL—to get prisoners who have earned it and who have been properly risk assessed out of their cells and into real workplaces. That will enable prisoners to build trust and prove themselves with an employer. If people do ROTTL, they are more likely to be employed, and if they are employed, they are less likely to reoffend.

Jim Shannon: I thank the Secretary of State for his response. Of the 4,221 prisoners who reoffended in Northern Ireland, over two fifths, 43.6%, reoffended within the first three months. Will the Minister outline whether any initiatives are specifically aimed at providing guidance in those all-important first three months?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Whether through the probation service, through charities or in prisons, we need to ensure that offenders get support when they are released. A lot of that work can be done within prison, which is why the education and employment strategy is so important. We want people to be geared up to go into employment when they are released, because if they are employed, they are less likely to offend.

Alex Chalk: I warmly welcome attempts to improve the employability of those in custody, but that will work only if the training relates to jobs that individuals want and for which there is a need in society. What steps are being taken to ensure that the resources are properly targeted at what will work best?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend is right. Returning again to the education and employment strategy, our emphasis is on ensuring that training is focused on what will help people into work, and we are giving governors greater control and discretion to ensure that they are well placed to do that.

23. [906370] Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Female offenders often have complex needs and getting the right support in place can be vital in helping them to turn their lives around, so why have members of the Government’s advisory board said that recent announcements from the Secretary of State represent a missed opportunity and are simply not sufficient to achieve his ambitions?

Mr Gauke: The female offender strategy, which I outlined a couple of weeks ago, has by and large had a positive response, and our focus on residential centres has been warmly welcomed. Of course, there are those who are calling for us to go further, and we will continue to listen and engage, but the direction in which we are going has widespread support and fully recognises the hon. Lady’s important point that we need to address complex needs.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Data has highlighted that two thirds of young offenders have speech, language and communication problems. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, with joint working across the Department for Education, the Department of Health and Social Care and the justice system to bring forward programmes that will tackle the issue from birth, such as parental training, more health visitors and better advice, we could actually prevent many young people from ever getting into the criminal justice system?
Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend raises several important points, and I will try to address one or two of them. On the need for us to work across Government, many issues are not just for the Ministry of Justice, but for the likes of the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education. It is also the case that we want to work upstream, because if we can address the complex problems that exist, we can stop people committing crimes in the first place.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Effective employment via the Through the Gate programme depends on effective community rehabilitation companies, which the Select Committee on Justice recently described as “wholly inadequate.” What plans does the Secretary of State have to fix community rehabilitation companies in Through the Gate?

Mr Gauke: The right hon. Gentleman is correct to say that the Through the Gate service needs to improve, and we are engaging with CRCs on that issue. We recognise it does not meet the standards we require, and it is important that we engage. We have been clear with the CRCs that they need to improve their performance, and we are in commercial negotiation with providers to secure the quality of services, including Through the Gate services, that we need.

Youth Justice System

2. Dr Caroline Johnson (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reform the youth justice system. [906348]

11. Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to reform the youth justice system. [906357]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): Since the creation of our youth justice reform programme in 2017, reports by Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons have highlighted improvements in the youth secure estate. It is encouraging to see that our reforms are starting to have an impact on the ground, but there is more to do, which is why we are continuing to invest in system-wide reform further to improve safety and outcomes, and why we are expanding frontline public sector staff capacity at young offender institutions. That is why this is a priority for me and for the Secretary of State.

Dr Johnson: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his promotion to a ministerial role. Many children and young people in custody have poor educational attainment. What is he doing to ensure that children in custody have access to good education?

Edward Argar: I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. Her work with young people, on both their health and welfare, is well known.

Education should be at the heart of youth custody and must meet the needs of young people. It is there to prepare them for employment, an apprenticeship or continued education when they are resettled back into their communities. We are building more flexibility into the core day, which is designed to ensure that all children receive an individualised education programme tailored to their needs. We are working with each YOI on plans for improving delivery of education to those young people who are unwilling or unable to participate in the mainstream regime.

Maggie Throup: I also welcome my hon. Friend to his new role. Does he agree that, although these reforms are welcome, they form only part of the solution? Can he outline what work his Department is doing to support community-based projects, which can play a crucial part in preventing more young people from entering the youth justice system in the first place?

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I agree that support in the community plays a vital role in our efforts to reduce the number of those entering youth custody. I am clear that custodial sentences should be handed down only when absolutely necessary, which is why we have provided £72 million to the Youth Justice Board for the youth offending teams that deliver youth justice services and for community-based interventions.

Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab): Howard League research shows that children aged 16 and 17 who are living in children’s homes are at least 15 times more likely than other children of the same age to be criminalised. What discussions have Ministers had with other Departments about reducing the number of care leavers in our justice system?

Edward Argar: I hope that the hon. Lady will allow me to point to my future intentions. Having been in post for just shy of three weeks, I have not yet had any formal discussions; I have had the informal discussions I mentioned. I intend that bilateral meetings with colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will be part of my regular meetings programme.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I, too, warmly congratulate my hon. Friend on his appointment. With nearly 80% of young offenders who are sentenced to a short term of imprisonment going on to reoffend, prison is not working. It is not working for them, or for the victims of crime, which means there are more victims of crime. Will he consider a presumption against short-term sentences and instead consider a rigorous community system with a focus on rehabilitation?
Edward Argar: Although it is right that sentencing decisions should always rest with the judiciary and a custodial sentence should always be an option where the nature of the offence absolutely merits it, given the persuasive evidence that short custodial sentences are not the most effective way to secure rehabilitation and reduce reoffending, we will be looking at what more we can do to provide alternatives and to highlight that short custodial sentences should be used only as a last resort.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I, too, welcome the new Minister to his position. May I recommend to him the Lammy review? In it he will see that there is tremendous concern that the youth prison population now is 43% from a black or ethnic minority background. Will he look closely at its recommendations and can I meet him soon?

Edward Argar: First, I commend the right hon. Gentleman for his work on that review, which is well known to this House and beyond. It is an excellent review, with an excellent report, which was one of the first documents I read upon my appointment. I considered all its 35 recommendations carefully and I am absolutely delighted to agree to meet him.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): The last inspection report on Oakhill said that there is no evidence that the 80 children held there are adequately cared for. Oakhill is managed by G4S. I have been asking parliamentary questions about whether G4S is meeting its contractual obligations there and the answers are revealing:

“The Contract for Oakhill STC is between the Secretary of State for Justice and STC Milton Keynes Ltd (the Contractor), of which G4S is their Operating Sub-Contractor. We therefore do not have information on the proportion of contractual obligations that G4S has met.”

Does the Minister agree that that is yet more proof that outsourcing and privatisation should be ended in our prison system?

Edward Argar: It is a pleasure to answer the shadow Secretary of State from the Dispatch Box. He highlights an extremely important issue. I believe there is a role for the public, private, and voluntary and philanthropic sectors in our justice system. He highlights the issues at Oakhill. Ofsted’s findings in the inspection report on Oakhill at the end of last year are unacceptable, and we took urgent action to address the concerns raised. We are robustly monitoring performance against the contract, and I am clear that all options remain on the table.

MOJ Staff on Low Pay: Wages and Conditions

4. Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): What steps is he taking to improve wages and conditions for staff of his Department who are on low pay. [906350]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the staff of the MOJ on, and thank them for, all the important work they do across a number of spheres. The MOJ continues to pay the statutory national living wage or above to all its staff.

Catherine West: I thank the Minister for her answer, but will she explain why the same workers are paid the London living wage in the Department for International Development? Does she believe that a cleaner in DFID is worth more than a cleaner in her Department?

Lucy Frazer: Obviously, I cannot comment on DFID, but I can comment on the MOJ. We pay a significant number of our employees the real living wage. As at 1 December last year, only 1,791 of more than 22,000 employees within the MOJ and its agencies, excluding Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service, were paid below the real living wage. In HMPPS, only 540 out of more than 47,000 direct employees were paid below the real living wage.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): No one has to be a public servant, and it is really important that prison officers get up in the morning and enjoy going to work. There were some worrying figures recently showing an increase in the number of prison officers leaving the profession. What more can we do on induction and supervision to keep our excellent prison officers in post, where they are desperately needed?

Lucy Frazer: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We are of course recruiting more prison officers. Enjoying one’s work is not just about pay, and the reward strategy in prisons is about officers working closely with their prison governors to ensure that they have an opportunity to develop in work and get the most out of their work.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): I regularly ask parliamentary questions about staffing levels and conditions at the private probation companies. The answers from the Department are shocking. None of the community rehabilitation company contracts specifies that CRCs must maintain staffing numbers at a particular level. When Ministers bailed out the private probation companies last year with another £342 million, they did not bother to make staffing levels a contractual obligation. Why not? Does the Department not care about accountability? Or is it because, in the Secretary of State’s privatised probation service, profits always come first?

Lucy Frazer: We believe it is important that systems work and that outcomes are effective. The contracts focus on ensuring that the right outcomes are achieved, not on the number of people who work under them.

Leaving the EU: UK Legal System

5. Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): What steps the Government plan to take to ensure that the UK legal system operates effectively after the UK leaves the EU. [906351]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): With the European Union (Withdrawal) Act having now received Royal Assent, we are ensuring that this country’s statute book will operate effectively after we leave the EU.

Mary Robinson: The application of new technology has the potential to make our justice system even fairer and more effective. Measures such as the adoption of
the use of video technology in court by the Courts and
Tribunals Service could aid speed and accessibility. Will
the Minister tell me how the Government aim to encourage
much-needed innovation in the justice and legal system?

Lucy Frazer: The Ministry of Justice is doing a
number of things to improve innovation. In the courts
themselves, we have a £1 billion programme that is
digitalising our court services and bringing them up to
date. We are also ensuring that our legal services sector
continues to thrive and prosper globally. Only yesterday,
we had the first meeting of the law tech panel, which
is supported by Government but led by the industry
to support innovation and technology for our legal
services sector.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): Last
month, the Scottish Government produced the latest in
their series of “Scotland’s Place in Europe” policy papers.
The paper emphasises the importance of co-operation
with the European Union on criminal justice and law
enforcement for Scotland’s legal system, which is of
course separate from the legal system for the rest of the
UK. Will the Minister tell us what discussions she has
had with her Scottish counterparts about that policy
paper?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. and learned Lady makes an
important point, because we have distinct legal systems
in Scotland and in England and Wales, and we must
recognise that. Last month, I had the pleasure of meeting
Michael Clancy from the Law Society of Scotland to
discuss a number of issues relating to Scotland. My
officials meet regularly with their counterparts in Scotland.

Joanna Cherry: We know from the Chequers agreement
that the Prime Minister is relaxing her red lines on the
European Court of Justice. The Scottish Government
stated in the paper that I mentioned that they would
welcome ECJ jurisdiction on data protection matters to
maintain data sharing for justice and law enforcement
purposes. Just last week, the Exiting the European
Union Committee recommended that the ECJ should
continue to have jurisdiction over aspects of data protection
after we exit the EU. Does the Minister agree with the
Scottish Government and the Select Committee that
that would be a good thing?

Lucy Frazer: The Prime Minister has made it clear
that the ECJ will no longer have direct jurisdiction in
this country. Where we continue to operate common
rules, it will of course be appropriate that this country
can look to the ECJ jurisprudence to decide the way
forward.

Offenders: Help to Find Employment

6. David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): What steps
his Department is taking to help offenders find employment
upon leaving prison. [906352]

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice
(Mr David Gauke): The education and employment
strategy will set each prisoner on a path to employment
from the outset. Through work, people can turn their
backs on crime. Good behaviour and hard work will be
rewarded with opportunity. Since the strategy’s publication,
more than 30 new organisations have registered an
interest in working with offenders. Nine Government
Departments are signed up to the Going Forward into
Employment pilot to hire ex-offenders in the civil service,
and the first cohort of offenders is already in post.

David T. C. Davies: I thank my right hon. Friend’s
Department for the interest it has already shown in a
project to enable serving prisoners to undertake the
theoretical exams required for a career in the haulage
industry, which is currently very short of workers. As a
result of the meetings I have had with the Department,
a pilot project is taking place in south Wales. I thank
Ministers for that and ask that they continue to show
interest in the project.

Mr Gauke: I thank my hon. Friend for his point. It is
an example of where I hope that my Department and
Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service can work
with employers to ensure that we help get more people
into work, which is good for the individual offenders,
good for the employers and society benefits as a whole
because it contributes to reducing reoffending.

Chris Elmore (Ogmore) (Lab): The Justice Secretary
will know that there is no women’s prison in Wales and I
am not advocating that there should be one. However,
that will mean that there are considerable issues of
geography for some women who do commit offences, so
can he set out how he is able to support women who do
offend, who live in Wales and who wish to relocate there
in order to find employment in communities that they
know and in which they have often grown up?

Mr Gauke: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question.
I point him in the direction of the female offender
strategy, which we published a couple of weeks ago.
One point that we argue in that is that, in many cases,
custodial sentences are not the right approach, particularly
for female offenders who, disproportionately, are sentenced
to short sentences that disrupt their lives and do little to
help them rehabilitate. If we can do more about helping
in the community and, for example, making use of
residential centres, we can help ensure that more female
offenders get into work.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): Eighteen
months ago, a constituent of mine who had left prison
just before Christmas and been through perfunctory
training and employment introductions found himself
out of prison and living on the street within 36 hours.
Before the new year came round, he had committed
another offence and been given another 12 months in
prison. Will the Secretary of State commit to making
sure that packages that are aimed at getting prisoners
into work after prison actually work and are not perfunctory
and that, from the day a person enters the criminal
justice system, they are trained to live a fruitful life once
they leave it?

Mr Gauke: I agree entirely with the right hon.
Gentleman’s point. He highlights an example—a sad
example, but not. I accept, the only one—where people,
too quickly, go out of prison and commit a crime and
are then set in a cycle of offending and reoffending.
The system is not working for them or for society. The
purpose of the education and employment strategy, which is implicit in his question, is an important point, and we must ensure that we implement it successfully. The purpose of that is to address this very issue.

**Sir Mike Penning** (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): Some of the people who are disproportionately represented inside the prison system are ex-servicemen. What plans does the Secretary of State have to bring charities such as Care after Combat into the prisons to help to ensure that reoffending does not take place and that these people who are heroes one day are not villains the next?

**Mr Gauke:** My right hon. Friend raises an important point. It is important for all offenders that we address this issue, but there is a particular point about ex-service people. He is right to highlight the very strong charitable sector in this area. I am determined to ensure that we continue to engage with those charities to provide people with the support they need, making sure in particular, in the context of his question, that those who have served this country are not disadvantaged.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Reducing reoffending rates is crucial. What information are the Minister and the Government providing in wider society to point out the benefits of a reduction in reoffending? I am doing my little bit that way. That is a message that I have just delivered a speech making that very point, so we need to get across. How do we reduce reoffending?

**Rory Stewart:** You are right, Mr Speaker; it does sound a pretty rum business to me. Johnny Mercer: I know that my hon. Friend likes nothing more than donning his budgie smugglers and sitting in the back garden on a Sunday afternoon. Drones can be a menace in that regard. Will he confirm exactly what he is doing in some of the measures that he is putting in place to combat drones in prison?

**Mr Speaker:** That sounds a very rum business to me.

**Rory Stewart:** We have made a lot of progress on the issue. In prisons such as Liverpool, where the new grilles are coming in, and Chelmsford, where we have the new protective equipment in place, we can see that it is more and more difficult to get a drone into a prison. When the nets are working and the grilles are up, it is difficult to do. There are other things we can do, too. One central thing is intelligence operations to identify organised criminal gangs. We are introducing sentences—in a recent case someone who flew a drone into a prison received a seven-year sentence.

**Dr Paul Williams** (Stockton South) (Lab): Is it estimated that more than 200 kg of drugs were smuggled into prisons in England and Wales in 2016. What proportion of that 200 kg does the Minister estimate was delivered by drones? What else is happening to stop the use of other methods of delivering drugs into prisons?

**Rory Stewart:** The payload of a drone is relatively limited. The amount of weight that it can carry tends to be 1 kg or 2 kg at the maximum. Therefore the majority of drugs that come into prison are almost certainly going over the wall by other means—thrown over or posted over impregnated in paper—or carried in by people coming into the prison. That is why we are investing much more now in different types of scanners to pick up any human bringing drugs into prison and are also ensuring that we have the perimeter security in place for the throwovers.

**Mobile Phones: Smuggling into Prisons**

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the use of drones over prisons.

**Sir Henry Bellingham** (North West Norfolk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to tackle the use of drones over prisons.

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart):** It is central that we also tackle mobile telephones. The reason is that if we do not, crimes can be committed by people within prison reaching outside the prison walls, both bringing illicit substances into the prison and terrorising their victims outside.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) for the private Member’s Bill that she effectively took through on Friday. That is going to make it much more difficult for people to use mobile phones in prisons, by working with the mobile telephone companies.
Scott Mann: I was in the Chamber to see the progress of my hon. Friend’s Bill on Friday. It is an exceptionally well put together Bill. What discussions has the Minister had with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport about the implementation? When are we likely to see some progress?

Rory Stewart: I have met the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and we have looked at two areas. We have looked at devices that can be used within the prison walls. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann) pointed out in his speech on Friday, and in his question today, there is much more that we can now do by working with the mobile telephone companies to identify the exact frequencies and strengths of transmissions, to locate the mobile phones, prevent their use and analyse the traffic data.

Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): Diolch yn fawr iawn. I rise as co-chair of the justice unions parliamentary group. Management at HMP Berwyn has made much of the use of digital technology as part of its innovative regime, but in recent days, prison officers there have lost teeth through being head-butted, have been injured, pushed down stairs and had excrement and urine thrown over them. I am told that violence against staff goes effectively unpunished, with prisoners spending only a few hours in segregation. Senior management lost a vote of confidence by prison officers last week. Given the Secretary of State’s announcement today, what will the Minister do to safeguard prison officers at Wrexham?

Rory Stewart: This is a very serious point and a very serious challenge. I will be following up this allegation with the governor. The governor has generally done a very good job in Berwyn, and the report that the hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), who took some of this forward in his time as the governor, has generally done a very good job there. Some of the safety regimes, it is almost impossible to do other forms of rehabilitation. We need to learn from the prisons that are doing best in reducing violence. I pay tribute, for example, to Wandsworth, which has made a lot of progress over the past 12 months.

Female Offenders

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): I am pleased that, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set out, on 27 June we published our new strategy for female offenders. This set out our vision and plans to improve outcomes for women in the community and in custody, but, most importantly in doing so, to help reduce reoffending and see fewer victims of crime. A key theme of the strategy is the need for a joined-up approach to addressing the often complex needs of female offenders, including through new women’s residential centres, which give judges an alternative to short custodial sentences.

Helen Whately: I congratulate my hon. Friend on his new role. East Sutton Park prison in my constituency has a fabulous reputation for preparing women offenders for life back in the real world. For instance, 90% of its inmates do not reoffend within two years, which, as he will know, is much better than the general national statistics. While I welcome the plans to reduce custodial sentences for women, may I ask for his support for this model prison in my constituency and invite him to come and see it for himself?

Edward Argar: As I highlighted in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), while a custodial sentence should always be an option, there is strong evidence that short custodial sentences do not achieve the best rehabilitation and reduction of reoffending outcomes. I recognise that women’s prisons, including East Sutton Park, of which my hon. Friend is a strong champion in this Chamber, are among our best. We will continue to work with it and I would be delighted to visit.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Given that Baroness Corston’s seminal 2007 review of women in prison set out a clear case for the benefit of women’s centres and said that they should be at the centre of a successful strategy on female offending, why are the Government insisting on piloting this when we already know that it works? Is it because of lack of funding?

Edward Argar: I pay tribute to the work of Baroness Corston in her ground-breaking 2007 report, and indeed to the work of the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson), who took some of this forward in his time as a Minister. The landscape of the evidence base on reoffending has continued to evolve and change. We continue to work with that model. We believe that the steps we have set out for five residential women’s centres as a pilot is the right way to approach this, but it remains only a first step on a journey.

Victoria Prentis (Banbury) (Con): I welcome the Government’s new women’s strategy. May I encourage the Minister, who I welcome to his place, shortly to meet the all-party parliamentary group on women in the penal system, and to work with me and Baroness Corston to ensure that we can deliver these reforms at pace?

Edward Argar: I pay tribute to Baroness Corston for her work. My hon. Friend is far too modest to highlight her own significant contribution in this area and her significant work with Baroness Corston. I have already written to the APPG that she chairs and would be absolutely delighted to come and meet it.

Mr Speaker: Well, it runs in the family, because the hon. Lady’s dad, as many will remember, was a very modest man, with nothing to be modest about.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): New Hall, one of the largest women’s prisons, is close to my constituency. The message that I am getting from it recently is, first, about the evaluation of whether new prisoners are literate or numerate, and whether they
have problems with autism. Secondly, it demands that all women prisoners should be safe and secure from sexual depredation when they are serving their sentence.

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman is right to highlight that safety should be at the heart of everything we do in our custodial estate, be that for female prisoners, male prisoners or young offenders. That is safety for the prisoners, safety for their fellow prisoners and safety for the prison officers who are looking after them. It remains a priority for me.

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Lab): The Government’s Advisory Board for Female Offenders identified £50 million that had been earmarked for building women’s prisons. Can the Minister guarantee today that all of that £50 million will be reinvested in the female offender strategy, or is this just another example of the Government’s refusal to properly fund that strategy?

Edward Argar: First, I pay tribute to the work of that panel and those on it. Although I have not yet had the opportunity to formally chair a meeting of the panel, I met a number of panel members at an informal meeting. The Ministry and this Government have never put a figure on the prison building programme. That is not a figure that I recognise. We have been very clear that our priority is investing in the strategy that the Secretary of State launched. We have already set out £5 million for that and made it clear that it is only the first step.

Prisoners: Access to Healthcare

12. Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): What plans the Government have made to improve access to healthcare for prisoners.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): Offender health is a key part of delivering a secure and safe environment for those in our custody. I will appear before the Select Committee on Health this afternoon to address questions on exactly that topic, and we continue to see investment in progress in this area.

Sarah Jones: My constituent has multiple sclerosis. He went to prison nine months ago, newly diagnosed and relatively healthy. Now he has two hearing aids, is partially sighted and has to use a wheelchair. Despite that extreme deterioration, he was only taken to see a neurologist seven months after his arrival in prison. As a vulnerable inmate, is he not owed a duty of care by the prison? At the very least, should he not be moved to a category D prison closer to home?

Edward Argar: I am grateful for the hon. Lady’s question. While it is not for me to talk about the categorisation of a particular prisoner, and I cannot go into the specific details of that case on the Floor of the House, I will say, as I said in answer to her initial question, that the care, health and wellbeing of prisoners is all of our concern. If she feels it would be helpful to discuss the specific case she mentions, I am happy to meet her.

Probation Service: Recruitment and Retention in Oxfordshire

13. Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): What recent assessment his Department has made of trends in recruitment and retention rates for the probation service in Oxfordshire.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): We have a series of challenges in relation to retention in Oxfordshire, some of which will be familiar to the hon. Lady. They are partly about the fact that people can get jobs in London, with London weighting, and they are partly to do with general problems around employment. We are, however, addressing them through a new recruitment campaign that is much more locally targeted, and I am pleased to say that we have managed to increase the number of applications from 500 to 5,000.

Layla Moran: I thank the Minister for his well-prepared answer, but the fact is that the probation service in Oxfordshire is at breaking point. That is also to do with sky-rocketing workloads, the high cost of living and paltry pay rises since 2009. One officer told me that they are being forced to cut corners and feel they “can no longer actively reoffending or keep the public safe.” How can we guarantee that these measures will actually work? Is it not time to consider a housing allowance?

Rory Stewart: We have been in discussion with the Treasury, and we got clearance this week to begin discussions with the unions on the question of pay. Of course pay matters, but we have also learned real lessons about recruitment. As I say, ensuring that we are not simply doing national recruitment campaigns but are specifically targeting Oxford markets and working in the relevant universities is really beginning to get results. We are filling places much more rapidly, and by the spring of next year, we should be fully staffed.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab) rose—

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for Battersea (Marsha De Cordova) should worry not, because I am very much hoping to get to her question. She is not in isolation—she is the leader of a group—so I am not going to muck up the group by calling her now, but I am hopeful that we can do it later.

Criminal Justice System: Contribution of Sport

14. Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): What assessment his Department has made of the contribution of sport to effective outcomes in the criminal justice system.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): There is good evidence that sport and physical activity have considerable benefits for the physical, mental and social wellbeing and motivation of prisoners while they are in custody and can improve their prospects for successful resettlement in the community. To understand the fuller picture, Professor Rosie Meek of Royal Holloway, University of London was commissioned to undertake
an independent review of the role of sport in youth justice. Her report will be published shortly, and we will respond to it.

Mark Pawsey: Programmes run by professional rugby clubs—such as the England-wide Hitz programme, which is run in my nearest premiership club, Wasps, and Saracens’ Get Onside in London—build up career aspirations for young offenders and those excluded from school. We have already heard that rates of reoffending are too high, but the Get Onside programme prevents 92% of the young offenders involved from returning to crime. Does the Minister recognise the benefit of these sports-based programmes?

Edward Argar: I am absolutely delighted to join my hon. Friend in highlighting the important and successful programmes of this sort that are run by clubs such as Saracens. They are already using sport and team sports such as rugby to improve outcomes in prison effectively, but also, importantly, to reduce reoffending on release. He is absolutely right to praise them.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): One of my constituents is concerned that her son has put on significant weight in prison. What are the Government doing to provide health education, sport and a better diet to help offenders?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight that all three of those factors play a part in whether a prison is a safe place and whether it looks after the welfare of those in it. As I have highlighted, we continue to focus on sport, and we have commissioned a review, and we continue, as does Her Majesty’s inspectorate of prisons in holding us to account, to deliver a healthy regime in prisons.

Prison Officers: Protection from Violence

15. Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to protect prison officers from violent behaviour.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): Reducing violent behaviour in prison is absolutely vital, particularly for our prison officers, who are doing unbelievably difficult and challenging jobs and turning around people’s lives. We are addressing this through body-worn cameras and better use of CCTV, and we are ensuring—in supporting the private Member’s Bill introduced by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant)—that we are doubling the minimum sentences for assaults against prison officers.

Tom Pursglove: When the new prison in neighbouring Wellingborough is open, it may create many new jobs for my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire. To encourage more people to apply for and then stay in prison officer roles, what thought are the Government giving to further deterrents and sanctions for violent prisoners?

Rory Stewart: My right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor laid out in a speech this morning the incentives and earned privileges schemes that he will be pushing for, which are exactly intended to incentivise good behaviour and make sure we turn around people’s lives. On the subject of my hon. Friend’s constituents, and indeed those of any Member, I want to re-emphasise that being a prison officer is one of the most honourable roles in public service and does an extraordinary amount for public safety. It is a challenging, fulfilling and tough job, and we would encourage more people to apply for that role.

Non-road Traffic Accident-related Personal Injury Claims

16. Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): What assessment he has made of the effect on access to justice for people injured at work of his Department’s plans to raise the limit for non-road traffic accident-related personal injury claims on the small claims track.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): On non-road traffic accident-related personal injuries, the decision has been made to increase the small claims limit from £1,000, where it was set in 1991, to £2,000 in line with retail prices index inflation. This is in line with what happens in many other European countries—in Norway, for example—in taking lawyers out of the smallest claims.

Dan Carden: In the light of the Supreme Court ruling on the Unison employment tribunal case, will the Minister think again? Increasing the small claims limit would remove the ability of many people injured in the workplace to pursue claims against their employees. The Minister will know from the Justice Committee’s report that litigation is the main driver for maintaining health and safety in the workplace.

Rory Stewart: The important thing to understand about the small claims process is that the shift from £1,000 to £2,000 is simply to ensure that the original 1991 legislation keeps up with inflation—the RPI increase—in line with the Judicial College guidelines. This is not about people with catastrophic, life-changing injuries, but about people with injuries below the £2,000 level. We are making sure that the small claims process is fair, transparent and easy for the public to access without expensive lawyers.

Gloria De Piero (Ashfield) (Lab): In its report on the small claims limit increases, the Justice Committee noted the “compelling evidence of the obstacles that would be faced”, and concluded that the changes would “represent an unacceptable barrier to access to justice.” Will the Minister listen and think again before pursuing another attack on workers?

Rory Stewart: I am always prepared to meet the hon. Lady and to listen. I emphasise again that this is simply a change in line with RPI. The small claims limit was set at £1,000 in 1991. The proposal is now to move it to £2,000, which is simply in line with the retail prices index, so that we have the same fair policy today that we had in 1991.
Probation Services

17. **Marsha De Cordova** (Battersea) (Lab): Whether he has plans to change the contracts of private sector probation companies; and if he will make a statement. [906363]

21. **John Spellar** (Warley) (Lab): Whether he plans to review the future provision of probation services; and if he will make a statement. [906367]

22. **Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Ind): Whether he plans to review the future provision of probation services; and if he will make a statement. [906369]

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice** (Mr David Gauke): We are currently in commercial negotiations with community rehabilitation companies, with the aim of amending contracts and improving operational performance. Once we have concluded those negotiations, we will be in a position to provide further detail about the changes that we intend to make.

**Marsha De Cordova**: Last year, the Ministry of Justice bailed out privatised probation companies to the tune of £342 million, leaving the public to foot the bill for their inadequate work, which the chief inspector of probation found to make a negligible difference. Will the Minister commit today that there will be no more bail-outs for those privatised probation companies?

**Mr Gauke**: We should be clear about what happened. Last year, we amended contracts to ensure that payments made to community rehabilitation companies were more in line with the costs that they incur to deliver core services. We are paying CRCs less than we originally intended when the contracts were let: they are receiving less than their costs, a consequence of over-optimistic bidding on their part. When we talk about bail-outs, we should be clear that those companies are receiving income that is less than it costs them to provide the services.

**Mr Gauke**: We should be clear about what happened. Last year, we amended contracts to ensure that payments made to community rehabilitation companies were more in line with the costs that they incur to deliver core services. We are paying CRCs less than we originally intended when the contracts were let: they are receiving less than their costs, a consequence of over-optimistic bidding on their part. When we talk about bail-outs, we should be clear that those companies are receiving income that is less than it costs them to provide the services.

**John Spellar**: Why will the Secretary of State not accept the conclusion of the Conservative-led Justice Committee that this is, in its words, “a mess” and may never work? Why does he not stop throwing good money after bad, cut his losses, blame his predecessor and be applauded for bringing this vital service back in-house?

**Mr Gauke**: As I said in my earlier answer, we are engaging with the CRCs, which do need to improve their service. The model that we have has opened up the delivery of probation services to a range of new providers. It has extended support and supervision to an additional 40,000 offenders leaving prison. First-generation contracts can be difficult to get right—I acknowledge that—but we are taking all necessary steps to get the performance that we require.

**Kelvin Hopkins**: Given the constant underperformance, high cost and deeply abject failure of private probation companies, is it not time to re-establish a professional, coherent and comprehensively public probation service?

**Mr Gauke**: I am not sure that the complaint about high cost holds together: the services are being delivered for less than we had expected, although we acknowledge that there are problems. The one thing we hear from the Opposition about justice is that the private sector should be kept out at all costs. I do not think that ideological approach is sensible. It is important that there should be a mixed market.

**Yasmin Qureshi** (Bolton South East) (Lab): Last year, as we have heard, the privatised probation services got a £342 million bail-out despite underperforming. There are press rumours that the contract will be changed again. Will the Minister give a commitment today that the privatised probation services will not get a penny more until the Government have held a review into the botched privatisation of probation services?

**Mr Gauke**: I come back to my previous points. The CRCs have been receiving less income than it costs them to deliver the services. Because of the reforms undertaken a few years ago, 40,000 offenders get support who would have got nothing previously. The contracts can be challenging; it is right that we look at that and deliver good value for money for the taxpayer and good-quality services. That is what we are determined to deliver.

**Topical Questions**

T1. [906372] **Mr Virendra Sharma** (Ealing, Southall) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice** (Mr David Gauke): Today, I have announced an additional £30 million investment in our prison estate, including £16 million to improve facilities at 11 of our most pressed prisons. Some £6 million will enhance security and tackle those co-ordinating drug dealing from inside through scanners, better searching and phone-blocking technology. Since February, 12 such serious criminals have been targeted for disruption, with nine already having been transferred to other parts of the estate, including more secure prisons.

**Mr Sharma**: The Government are conducting a review of the impact of the swingeing cuts to legal aid since 2012, but they have so far refused to say whether more funding will be made available for legal aid. Will the Secretary of State confirm that additional funding will be made available if it is found to be required, or is the review simply an exercise in moving legal aid funding from one cause to another?

**Mr Gauke**: The purpose of the review is to assess what we need to do. That is the correct way to go about it. Obviously, we will need to engage with the Treasury in terms of future spending reviews, but we have a serious piece of work, with very substantial engagement with stakeholders, on which to make an assessment of how the legal aid system is working.

T4. [906375] **Scott Mann** (North Cornwall) (Con): Will the Minister give an update on how restorative justice programmes are being rolled out and how they are being used for public good and environmental measures?
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): My hon. Friend is right to highlight the important role of restorative justice. The Ministry of Justice supports the provision of victim-focused restorative justice as one of a range of measures to help victims to cope with and recover from crime. A recent evaluation showed that 85% of victims who participated in restorative justice said they were satisfied with the experience, which can, of course, bring benefits to the community as well.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Lab): In my first two questions today, I focused on the widespread failings of privatisation in our justice system. I have written to the Secretary of State about the close relationship that his Department has with outsourcing giant Serco, a relationship that is ever closer given that his new Minister was once its spin doctor-in-chief. Will the Secretary of State confirm to the House today that he has reorganised responsibilities in his Department, so that his new Minister in charge of youth justice will not be involved in any way in any of the young offender institutions that Serco manages?

Mr Gauke: There has been no reorganisation of responsibilities. There is no conflict of interest here at all. The suggestion that because somebody has worked in the private sector for such a company, there is a conflict of interest is not accurate. The hon. Gentleman’s hostility to the private sector, in this sector and across the piece, is symptomatic of why the Labour party should be kept as far away from the Government Benches as possible.

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this important issue, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for successfully piloting the 2017 Act on to the statute book. Department officials are currently working with me to raise awareness of this deadly drug?

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Rory Stewart): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his campaigning on this issue. As right hon. and hon. Members are aware, fentanyl is an incredibly dangerous drug, because even in minuscule quantities, it can do more damage than heroin and cocaine. We have had nearly 240 deaths in Britain and the United States has had up to 20,000 deaths in a year from fentanyl, so the recent actions from the Sentencing Council and the Crown Prosecution Service to clarify how noxious this substance is are welcomed, and I repeat my tribute to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue.

Mr Gauke: There has been no reorganisation of responsibilities. There is no conflict of interest here at all. The suggestion that because somebody has worked in the private sector for such a company, there is a conflict of interest is not accurate. The hon. Gentleman’s hostility to the private sector, in this sector and across the piece, is symptomatic of why the Labour party should be kept as far away from the Government Benches as possible.

Edward Argar: My hon. Friend is right to highlight this important issue, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for successfully piloting the 2017 Act on to the statute book. Department officials are currently drafting rules of court regulations and a code of practice, so that those drafts can be finalised and consulted on. I am keen that we make as rapid progress as possible.

T6. [906377] Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): Although the Guardianship (Missing Persons) Act 2017 has received Royal Assent, families of missing people are still unable to make applications to become guardians of their loved ones’ affairs. Will they be able to do so before the end of this calendar year?

Edward Argar: The hon. Lady highlights an important issue. As she will be aware, the rules that govern how the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority operates are set by this House, but it operates entirely independently of Ministers in its awards and in its application of those rules. She highlights an important issue, which I know the Secretary of State will have heard very clearly.
making sure that the basic fabric is repaired. However, the most important thing is the building of 10,000 new prison places, beginning with Wellingborough and Glen Parva and moving on, to provide exactly the decent conditions that the hon. Lady raises in her question.

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): On Friday, we had an important debate in this House about telephone in prisons. On the back of that debate, will the Minister set out what more we are doing to tackle drugs in prisons?

Rory Stewart: Tackling drugs in prisons involves dealing with how the drugs get into the prison—either over the wall or on a person—the demand in the prison and the way that we search people within the walls. All these things need to be done simultaneously—supply, demand and searching—and the key to this is training, training, training.

T7. [906378] Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): Following the question from the hon. Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy), campaigners supporting missing people and their families are concerned, despite assurances that a timetable for implementation of the Guardianship (Missing Persons) Act 2017 would be set out before the summer. Will the Minister give the families the assurance of a specific timetable for the implementation of this vital Act and clarify when the rules of court will be published?

Edward Argar: I entirely understand the concern of the hon. Lady, many hon. Members and many members of the public about this issue and their determination to see this delivered. I share that determination, but it is important that, while we work at pace, we ensure that the rules of court are correct. I am determined to make sure that we do everything we can to speed it up.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): What analysis has the Ministry of Justice done on how well the public sector is doing in taking on ex-offenders in employment? Does the Minister agree that we cannot just exhort the private sector to step up to the plate in this area?

Mr Gauke: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight this point. Indeed, many parts of the public sector are stepping up and doing that—the Prison Service itself takes people on. We have a pilot programme in north-west England that is focused on this. My hon. Friend is tireless in campaigning for employers to take on ex-offenders, and I commend him on his activity.

T8. [906379] Gerald Jones (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): Family drug and alcohol courts have widespread support among lawyers, judges and policy makers, and they deliver far better outcomes for children and families than other options do. Despite that, the service faces closure because of funding cuts. Can the Secretary of State guarantee funding today to safeguard this vital service?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the family drug and alcohol courts do great work. The fact that the Tavistock and Portman Trust is not going forward with the programme will not affect any

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): On behalf of the Government, I stood at the Dispatch Box beside the Treasury Bench and promised the country that we would have a victims law. May I ask the Minister where that victims law is?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that question, and I know that the House is grateful to him for his work and his tireless campaigning in this area. We have made it clear that we are committed to bringing forward a victim strategy this summer, which will look at both legislative and non-legislative options for delivering what he mentions. I would be delighted to meet him to discuss it further.

T10. [906381] Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): In the light of the tragic hit-and-run accident in Coventry some time ago, in which two children were killed and a family devastated, are there any plans to review the law and sentencing in that area?

Rory Stewart: Absolutely. We remain very committed to this. We have undertaken extensive consultation on extending the maximum sentences for causing death by dangerous driving, and we are looking at those for causing death by careless driving. We intend to introduce legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: I think single-sentence questions are now required.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): In the light of the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham), when is the Secretary of State going to reply to my letter asking when longer sentences for causing death by dangerous driving will be introduced into legislation, as was promised in October last year?

Rory Stewart: I refer to my previous answer. This is a priority for the Government, but we need to find the right legislative instrument for doing it. Be in no doubt—it will happen.

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): Pursuant to the Minister’s response about the issue, raising the small claims limit for employers’ liability will affect about 40% of claimants, many of whose employers claim that those individuals contributed to their own accidents through negligence. How are they supposed to stand up, unrepresented, to their employer and their insurance company?

Rory Stewart: The entire purpose of the small claims court is to make sure that minor injuries—in this case, the claims limit was set in 1991 at less than £1,000 and will rise to £2,000—are dealt with without lawyers. The same thing happens in most of our European partner countries. Norway is a very good example of a model in
which exactly such cases are taken through without lawyers, up to a much higher value than would be the case here.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): The Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. and learned Member for South East Cambridgeshire (Lucy Frazer), wants to close the magistrates court in Cambridge. What assessment has she made of suggested ways to keep a magistrates court in Cambridge, and when will she make a decision?

Mr Gauke: The decision about the magistrates court in Cambridge will be for me to make. I want to look at all the evidence and the representations that have been made, and I will make a decision in due course.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): According to the Public and Commercial Services Union, there are almost 1,200 staff at the Ministry of Justice on poverty pay. Will the Minister support the union’s 5% pay claim for all public sector workers?

Lucy Frazer: I have already set out the figures in relation to pay, and I think the hon. Lady will find that they are not at 5%.

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): Jerome Rogers from New Addington in Croydon committed suicide when he was 20 years old, after being hounded by bailiffs who broke regulation after regulation in their horrific handling of his initial—very small—traffic fines. Jerome’s family will be in Parliament next week for a meeting of the all-party group on debt and personal finance, and there is a programme about his life, “Killed By My Debt”, on BBC 1 next week. Will the Minister please meet Jerome’s family?

Lucy Frazer: The hon. Lady makes an important point, and she will be aware that we are looking at the question of the small number of bailiffs who are not acting appropriately. I would be very happy to meet her and the family.

Mr Speaker: Finally—in a sentence, I am sure—Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State do something about the way in which we treat miscarriages of justice in this country, and will he meet the all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice to discuss it?

Mr Gauke: The hon. Gentleman will be aware of the case that was before the Supreme Court recently. We shall see where that leads, but I am sure that a member of the ministerial team would be delighted to meet the all-party parliamentary group.
Richard Burden: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I should be grateful if I could correct the record.

Last Wednesday, when I rose to ask the urgent question on Khan al-Ahmar that you had kindly granted me, I had just heard that bulldozers had arrived at the village, and that demolition had started. I reflected that in what I said.

Although demolition had indeed started at the nearby village of Abu Nuwar that morning, what I did not know was that the bulldozers had paused before commencing the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar. Whether that was because of the number of people who were there to protest—a number of whom were injured that day—or the presence of foreign diplomats, including those from the United Kingdom, I do not know. What I do know is that a court injunction has since been secured prohibiting the demolition until at least tomorrow. That makes the form of words that I used last week inaccurate, and I want to take this opportunity to correct the record.

In doing so, I thank Members in all parts of the House for raising their voices in opposition to the breach of international law at Khan al-Ahmar, which I am sure has helped to change the course of events in the past week. As the injunction is only temporary, however, pressure is still needed to keep the villagers of Khan al-Ahmar safe in the long term.

I am grateful for this opportunity to update the House, and to correct the record of last Wednesday’s exchanges.

Mr Speaker: I am moved to observe that the hon. Gentleman, who is a very dextrous and dedicated parliamentarian, stretched the elastic almost, but perhaps not quite, to snapping point in getting across a particular line of argument or set of observations that he wished to be recorded in the Official Report. However, I want to say two things in response to him. First, I thank him for his typical courtesy in giving me notice that he wished to raise this matter, and indeed for his promptness wished to raise this matter, and indeed for his promptness in correcting the record at the earliest opportunity. Secondly, of course I would accept his correction in any case, and I am sure that the House will, but I speak with some experience of the hon. Gentleman, because for nearly five years we served together on the Select Committee on International Development, and I know both the extent of his knowledge of the matters he has just raised and the absolutely undeniable sincerity with which he pursues what are not merely his concerns, but the concerns of a great many people. So I thank him.

Mr Speaker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I am concerned when from time to time there are lengthy queues that inhibit people from getting into the building. It is true that last night someone who was due to be present at—and eventually came to—the function taking place in Speaker’s House was delayed as a result of a queue. I think it important to be clear that sometimes it is perhaps our fault, and sometimes people perhaps do not allow sufficient time for the fact of the security process that they have necessarily to undergo.

As for the hon. Gentleman’s concern about what might be called malodorous matters, I am not unconscious of that phenomenon, although whether it is quite as pervasive as the hon. Gentleman suggests is, I think, a matter of some uncertainty. As the hon. Gentleman knows, however, I have always taken him immensely seriously, the more so now that he is in his 40th successive year as a Member of this House, and although I will probably regret saying this, I would exhort him, if he wishes to pursue the matter further, to write to me—although, as I say, I may very well regret tendering him that advice, for he normally requires no encouragement.

Mr Sheerman: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that you are a very busy man, but may I invite you to join me on a walk around the Palace so that we can see it in person?

Mr Speaker: I can imagine few things in this life more pleasurable than undertaking a leisurely excursion anywhere, including the Palace of Westminster, with the hon. Gentleman. After all, I have visited the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, and he has visited and spoken at his local university, praising him to the skies in the process, so it seems only fitting that the other end of the equation should be met. I dare say we will have a little toddle round the Place of Westminster together when the hon. Gentleman has got in touch with my office to arrange it, which I fancy he will require no further encouragement to do.

Mr Sheerman: This is a very busy time for Parliament, Mr Speaker. I do not know whether you have been able to see the queues that are gathering around the Palace, especially now, when so many schoolchildren are taking their last opportunity to visit. Is it right that the queues are so long, that security is so slow, and that most of the entrances to this great royal Palace are filthy, with the smell of urine, with vomit and dirt, and—well, I do not want to go into the details of what you can see at those entrances. Is it not about time that someone did something about this royal Palace and the access to it?

Mr Speaker: I am saving up the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden). I call Mr Barry Sheerman.

Mr Sheerman: I am extremely grateful to you to join me on a walk around the Palace so that we can see it in person?
would go to that should there be an incident, and they would not be able to get out. That is fundamentally wrong and dangerous.

Mr Speaker: If the right hon. Gentleman wishes to write to the director general of the House of Commons, who has overall managerial responsibility for the parliamentary estate and services delivered thereon, it is open to him to do so. I take very seriously what the right hon. Gentleman has said, but I know he would not expect me to furnish him with a detailed reply now.

Sir Mike Penning: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Very well.

Sir Mike Penning: When you are having a toddle around the Palace looking at entrances and other things, Mr Speaker, perhaps you could toddle down to the underground car park with me and see this for yourself?

Mr Speaker: I am not sure that we wish to conduct a procession on this matter, but I can certainly suggest to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) that, if it suits him and he has no violent objection to the idea, our little toddler will include a search of that area. The right hon. Gentleman will know that I myself do not now use that area as my vehicle is parked elsewhere, and therefore I do not have reason, I must readily acknowledge, to go there with any frequency at all, but it would do no harm to do so, and if also—this is a bold expression of hope—it would bring a smile to the face of the right hon. Gentleman to know that his request had been complied with, I require no further incentive.

**Bathing Waters**

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

12.48 pm

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to give the Environment Agency additional powers to control and reduce discharge from combined sewer overflows; to make other provision about bathing water quality and clean beach initiatives; and for connected purposes.

I rise to present this Bill in my name and those of my hon. Friends. The environment is very important to my constituents. I spend a lot of time taking questions in primary and secondary schools in North Cornwall and one question always comes up: “What are you doing about the environment?” Bathing waters are one of the most important reasons why people visit North Cornwall. I have some of the most beautiful blue flag beaches in the whole of the UK, and some of the most spectacular surfing and waves around the country. However, we have a significant problem.

My constituency has an antiquated Victorian sewerage system, as do many areas around the UK. The system is completely incapable of dealing with the torrential rain events that we have seen in recent years. Furthermore, when Governments invest in infrastructure, they tend to like people to be able to see that investment, and to be frank, sewers are not really that sexy. However, they serve a valuable purpose in taking away our surface water, general waste water and sewage to process. Most of the country relies on the combined sewer network in which surface water and toilet water are combined and treated together. When we have these big downpours and rain events, the system simply cannot cope and these incidents are described as combined sewer overflows, and they happen more regularly than many people think. When one of these events happens, my inbox is filled with surfers and swimmers asking me to do something. The purpose of the Bill is to do just that.

The Environment Agency publishes extensive data on individual bathing waters on its website, showing pressures on water quality on specific beaches and up-to-date sampling information. Real-time monitoring information websites are helpful to my constituents, but at present this is just information provided for the sake of it, and recent statistics from the World Wide Fund for Nature show that 77% of events do not result in a follow-up. I welcome and praise the work being done by Nature show that 77% of events do not result in a follow-up. I welcome and praise the work being done by South West Water in the west country and by other water companies around the UK, but we could and should go much further. Our environment deserves better than letting sewage spill into our oceans.

I know that many hon. Members feel that water companies have large payrolls and big corporate bonuses, and that more of their profits should be reinvested into the system. In fact the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs recently challenged the water companies to improve their financial and corporate behaviours in order to restore public trust in the sector. It is true to say that some water companies’ financial and corporate behaviours have eroded the public’s trust in the sector, and they must improve their financial and
corporate behaviours and practices, increase investment and offer fair prices to customers in order to restore that trust.

However, I think it would be unfair to ask the water companies to update the antiquated sewerage systems, so we have come up with a different way of approaching the issue. The reason that the system cannot cope is that the surface water run-off is too heavy during heavy rainfall events. The Bill will give the Environment Agency powers to fine water companies that allow sewage spills into the sea, and to reinvest that money in three different ways. First, it would provide farmers with funds to store water in attenuation ponds to slow down the water flow. Secondly, we should create more lakes and reservoirs—a proposal that is supported by the Angling Trust. Thirdly, in the areas with the most severe problems, the water companies should provide funding for free water butts and the fitting of those water butts in residential properties. Managing surface water would stop the sewage spills and allow the water companies to manage our waste water better.

The monitoring of the spills is also quite inadequate, and the Bill would ask the Environment Agency to monitor them all year round instead of doing so only in the summer months, as it does at the moment. There are many hardy souls who brave the waves in Cornwall in the middle of winter, and they want the same protections that are afforded the swimmers and surfers on the beaches in the summer months. I was able to glean the following information on the beaches in North Cornwall in preparation for today. The beaches that have had no spills in the past five years are Trevone, Harlyn bay, Trebarwith Strand, Crackington Haven and Crooklets in Bude. There is absolutely no information on Porthcothan, Treyarnon bay, Constantine bay, Mother Ivey’s bay, Daymer bay, Northcott Mouth and Sandymouth. Even Booby’s Bay had no information. So we can see that we need better monitoring of these processes. Polzeath had no spills last year but four the year before. Widemouth bay had three spills this year and five last year. Summerleaze in Bude in my constituency had four this year and 15 last year. Those are the figures just for North Cornwall, but I know that these issues affect many coastal areas and I would expect to see similar data from many other areas around the country.

I have received a number of endorsements for the Bill. I had a phone call from Surfers Against Sewage yesterday, and they are very supportive of it. The Angling Trust says that although sewage spills along the coastline regularly hit the headlines, 89% of combined sewage overflows actually discharge into the rivers. The trust is very supportive of the Bill and its contents. Locally, I have the support of the fabulous Bude Cleaner Seas project, which has campaigned for so long on environmental protection around our coast. I also have the support of the Polzeath Marine Conservation Group.

The European waters directives have been good for protecting our bathing waters, but I believe that we can go further. My list of supporters for the Bill extends past the 11 names that I am allowed to read out today, and I apologise to those who have given me their support but who I am unable to name at this time. I believe that the measures in the Bill will address a problem that has existed for a long time in North Cornwall and around the country, and I hope that elements of the Bill or indeed the Bill itself can make progress through the House so that all my constituents will be able to feel that we are leaving this environment in a better state than we found it in.

**Question put and agreed to.**

**Ordered,**

That Scott Mann, Richard Benyon, Mr Ben Bradshaw, Robert Courts, Steve Double, James Heappey, Craig Mackinlay, Dame Cheryl Gillan, Mrs Sheryll Murray, Justine Greening, Tim Loughton and David Morris present the Bill.

Scott Mann accordingly presented the Bill.

**Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 23 November, and to be printed (Bill 248).**
Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill

Considered in Committee

DAME ROSIE WINTERTON in the Chair

Clause 1

Exemption for buildings used as nursery grounds

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

12.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship today, Dame Rosie. I should like to start by reiterating this Government’s commitment to supporting the sustainable growth of farming and horticultural businesses. We firmly believe that the agricultural exemption from business rates plays an important role in supporting this aim and boosting agricultural productivity. This measure will therefore help to drive our ambitions for a more dynamic and self-reliant agricultural industry. Until a Court of Appeal ruling in 2015, the long-standing practice of the Valuation Office Agency had been to apply the agricultural exemption to all plant nurseries. However, the ruling clarified that the exemption did not apply to plant nurseries in buildings that were not occupied together with agricultural land, and used solely in connection with agricultural operations on that or other agricultural land. This does not reflect Government policy, and neither does it reflect our commitment to growth in the rural economy. The Bill will therefore amend the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and enable the Valuation Office Agency to return to its former practice of exempting all plant nurseries solely consisting of buildings. It will also enable the VOA to exempt those plant nurseries that have been assessed since the ruling.

The Government have been consistently clear that they would take action on this matter. In March 2017, we set out our intention to legislate in a written ministerial statement. A further written ministerial statement was made in 2018, restating our intention to legislate and for the first time confirming that the measure would have retrospective effect in England from 1 April 2015. In Wales, the measure will have effect from 1 April 2017. The Bill delivers on that commitment and, once enacted, it will restore the previous practice and enable refunds to be provided to the handful of plant nurseries that have already been assessed for business rates as a consequence of the Court of Appeal ruling. While the Bill will restore the practice of exempting plant nurseries and buildings, it will not otherwise disturb the existing boundary of the agricultural exemption. The Bill amends schedule 5 to the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which determines the extent to which certain hereditaments are exempt from business rates.

Turning specifically to clause 1, it amends paragraph 3 of schedule 5 to the 1988 Act, providing that a building that “is or forms part of a nursery ground and is used solely in connection with agricultural operations at the nursery ground” will, subject to the passage of this Bill, be exempt from business rates. Clause 1 also contains a provision that the measure will have effect from 1 April 2015 in England and from 1 April 2017 in Wales, as requested by the Welsh Government. That will ensure that the measure has the intended retrospective effect and that refunds can be provided as necessary.

Jim McMahon (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): Dame Rosie, you will be pleased to hear that the Bill is non-contentious. It simply fixes the position as it was before the 2015 Court of Appeal ruling and, on that basis, the Opposition are happy to allow the Government to go ahead without objection.

It was said both in the press and when the Local Government Finance Bill was in Committee before the election that the Government were pledging to right the wrong of the Court of Appeal’s hearing after listening to businesses’ concerns, but several other similar representations have been made. For example, in towns where the banks have closed and there is no post office, a convenience store might step in to install a cash machine, but it would straight away be taxed on the turnover of the cash machine, which could take the store over the threshold for small business rate relief. There have been calls for that issue to be examined, but we are yet to see any progress.

Another big issue affecting many high streets and town and city centres is the impact of business rates on the viability of retail. We see companies go under on an almost weekly basis because they cannot afford to meet the high running costs of operating in primary locations. Communities resent seeing their local high streets and town centres go downhill, and businesses and representatives of other organisations have made the same point, but the Government have offered nothing comprehensive in response, because there would be a big bill.

However, the truth is that if we want to save our town centres and high streets, we must be bold and fully examine how such premises are taxed if they are to have any future. This goes beyond business; this is about communities. When people talk about how well or badly their communities are doing, they will often point to their town centres and high streets as a barometer. When people see the roller shutters pulled down or boards over windows, that has a material effect on how they feel about their community, and the Government ought to take note of that.

When the Local Government Finance Bill was in Committee, the Opposition made the offer that where there were non-contentious issues on which local government was seeking progress, we were happy to sit down and go through a plan for the legislation that ought to be brought forward. That would be done away from partisan interests because it is the right thing to do for our communities, and I look forward to the Minister arranging such a meeting.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I am delighted to speak in support of a Bill that rights a wrong that was clearly never intended in the first place, and I have the honour of being the Member who first raised this issue when the Local Government Finance Bill was in Committee last year. Unfortunately, however, the Conservative party’s majority was not the only victim of last year’s general election, because that Bill

...
fell at that point and the amendment that was likely to be made to it could not be passed, hence the need for this new Bill.

Plant nurseries play a vital role in this country’s food production supply chain. At a time when we want to increase domestic food supply and become less reliant on imported food, it is right to do all we can to support an important industry and ensure that we do not impose a further tax on producers that would see them struggle with the additional costs. Many of them would face the possibility of going out of business, with the loss of jobs that that would entail. The Bill sets out to put in place what the Local Government Finance Act 1988 always intended and to ensure that the exemption for nurseries continues. It will support our rural economy, ensuring that we support food production and that jobs are retained in the industry. I am therefore pleased to support the Bill to ensure that it becomes an Act as soon as possible.

Mr Simon Clarke (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that this is a crucial Bill, because it gives hope to so many businesses that underpin life in rural constituencies such as his and mine?

Steve Double: I agree that it is vital to support those important businesses in our rural communities. If the jobs that they provide were lost, it would be difficult to replace them.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill is important for farmers wanting to intensify their businesses, because it will put it beyond doubt that any nursery operation will come under the scope of the exemption?

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that good point. We should do all that we can to support our farmers who want to diversify and expand their businesses, such as growing plants in greenhouses and so on, and they should be able to do so with confidence and in the knowledge that they will not suddenly incur a business rates bill. It is therefore correct that we introduce clarity and put right the wrong that the court case created. As I said, I do not believe that that wrong was ever the intention of Parliament or the Government, and we should provide the sector with confidence that horticultural buildings and nurseries will continue to attract the agricultural exemption that they should rightly have.

I acknowledge the role played by the National Farmers Union in bringing the matter to my attention and lobbying on this issue. It has spoken up for its members, ensuring that their voices have been heard. I thank the Minister and the former Local Government Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), for listening carefully to the arguments, agreeing to take this measure and ensuring that the matter is corrected. I welcome the Bill and trust that it will pass unopposed with wholehearted support from across the House so that it can reach the statute book as quickly as possible to support this sector.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I rise to support clause 1. As ever, it is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double), although he has just reminded me of the Local Government Finance Bill and the many interesting and fun hours that we spent on it, particularly in Committee. Fortunately, however, those hours were subsequently lost when the Bill fell, so it is good to see this measure coming to the House, as have several other provisions that were in the previous Bill.

The agricultural exemption for nursery grounds has been in place for a significant period, dating back to 1929. Indeed, this issue was raised during the passage of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, when Ministers gave a steer that there was a clear intention that nursery grounds should be subject to the same sort of exemption as other agricultural uses. The Court of Appeal case—the Tunnel Tech case—seems to have driven a coach and horses through the custom and practice since 1929 and the intimation given by the then Government during the passage of the 1988 Act that the status quo would prevail. To put it mildly, suddenly receiving a significant rates bill as the result of a Valuation Office Agency investigation and the subsequent Court of Appeal case has challenged a number of growers in the running of their businesses.

I am pleased in many ways to have played a small part in the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay apprehended me in the Division Lobby one evening to explain the challenge he was seeing in his area as a result of this Court of Appeal ruling and the problems it was likely to cause growers. We subsequently had meetings with the National Farmers Union, which put a coherent and collegiate case for restoring the status quo.

I am glad that, when I approached the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and the matter was put before Ministers—we do not always receive this type of response—the unanimous verdict was that the Court of Appeal decision was not the right thing for growers and other such businesses and was not consistent with the Government’s intention. I was delighted to publish a written ministerial statement confirming the Government’s intention to restore the position as it was before the Court of Appeal ruling and to allow the agricultural exemption in this regard, as was clearly intended.

Ben Bradley (Mansfield) (Con): My hon. Friend mentions the NFU’s contribution. Will he join me in showing appreciation for its work in representing our farming and agricultural industries, particularly when we are deciding on the future of those industries? Does he agree it is important that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in particular, continues working with the NFU to make sure we get the policy right?

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important and pertinent point. The agricultural industry is very different from many other industries in this country. This country needs to be as self-sufficient as possible in food production, and we also need to consider that it is often difficult for producers in the industry to recover their costs. For example, there has been a perennial challenge for milk producers, which have not been able to realise even the cost of production. That is why organisations such as the NFU are extremely important in bringing such issues to the fore so that we maintain our food security.
Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown: Does my hon. Friend agree that, with Brexit, it will be ever more important that this type of horticultural industry is as competitive as possible? Countries such as Holland and Italy are increasingly competing with our industry, and it is much better to grow food here for phytosanitary, employment and all sorts of other reasons.

Mr Jones: I completely agree with my hon. Friend. Again, he is absolutely right that, wherever we can, we should be producing food in this country for those reasons.

Importantly, clause 1 is a retrospective measure. Such measures are often not retrospective, but it is important that the Bill is being implemented retrospectively, because a number of growers have already been caught by the provisions of the Court of Appeal decision and, as a consequence, have seen their business costs rise significantly. I have mentioned the challenges that agricultural producers often face, and those challenges are compounded when growers are retrospectively asked for an amount of money that they did not anticipate they would need to build into their business costs.

In this case, a number of growers will have already sold their produce and therefore will not have factored this into their price, if they were able to do so. The decision will put a significant strain on the businesses in question, so I am pleased the Bill is being applied retrospectively and that businesses that have already been caught by the Court of Appeal decision will be refunded any business rates they have paid.

Steve Double: Does my hon. Friend share my view that another reason why we need to keep costs down is to allow the industry to invest as much as possible in emerging new techniques and technologies for developing and growing food and increasing yield? An additional tax burden would reduce the amount of money the industry can invest for the future.

Mr Jones: My hon. Friend is right. There is huge potential for such industries to grow—pardon the pun—but investment in technology is needed for them to do that. If the Government or, in this case, the Court of Appeal decide to levy an additional cost on such businesses, bearing in mind many of them are small and medium-sized businesses, the chances of their being able to continue investment will be diminished. The Bill will therefore help us to facilitate businesses in taking advantage of new technological advances. By being more likely to invest than they otherwise would have been, they will be able to further themselves, and hopefully not only will their prospects improve but they will add to UK GDP and add jobs in their local area.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Minister, who is now bringing the Bill forward. The Bill is a positive step to put right a Court of Appeal decision that most rational people consider to be wrong. I am extremely glad that the Bill is being applied retrospectively. As colleagues have said today, not only will it enable growers to continue growing produce to sell on to other growers, who can then provide the produce we all buy in the shops and subsequently eat, but it will enable growers to invest for the future. The Bill will make sure this country continues to be a leading player in advancing how we grow our food and sustain our population.

Matt Warman (Boston and Skegness) (Con): It is extraordinary that this House has spent so long talking about doing such a simple thing as undoing the errant court judgment, and I suspect we may even continue talking about it for a few minutes yet. However, that is only fitting, because, as has been said by a number of my hon. Friends, including the Minister, and by the Opposition, we are all here concerned about this issue as we understand the profound impact that a single court judgment could have had, not only on businesses up and down the country, but on the food chain and even on the communities and local economies that those businesses support.

I have talked in the previous debate on this matter about the individual constituency business that came to me to discuss the impact this court judgment would have had, not only on its business and bottom line, but, crucially, on the income to the local internal drainage board. This would have meant that in my constituency, which is the most at risk of flooding in the country, according to the Association of British Insurers, not only would businesses and livelihoods have been affected, as others have said, but, even worse, that huge swathes of the area would have been at greater risk of flooding. That would have posed a real threat to the broader economy, the food chain and huge numbers of people who live in areas at or sometimes below sea level and who rely on those internal drainage boards being able to function.

The Bill is therefore a hugely important tweak to the legislation that was inadvertently altered by the court judgment, and it is a fitting tribute to the change that the previous Minister and this Minister are initiating and seeing through respectively that we have devoted a reasonable amount of parliamentary time to it. However, it is worth pointing out that we would hope in future, in legislation generally, not just in this area, to avoid a single court judgment having the kind of ramifications that this one has had here. We would all like not to put our constituents through the genuine trauma of knowing that the business they work for might face real financial difficulties simply because of a single court judgment. Somewhat unusually, these people in my area may also face the risk of their homes and businesses being flooded, which is an additional factor.

Although it is good that the Government are fixing this and the Opposition parties have co-operated so readily in fixing it, we should also bear in mind that it would have been better not to have found ourselves in this situation in the first place. So my plea to the Minister is to see what he can do, working across the Government—I do not pretend that all the problems are in his Department, by any means—to avoid legislation where we have not thought through all the potential consequences of the precise wording. We spend a lot of time in Bill Committees and in Committee of the whole House going through pieces of legislation line by line, paying close and deep attention to every moment in those Committees, but sometimes such things lay themselves open to unintended consequences, so we would all welcome anything that can be done to try to avoid them.

Clearly, the Government have acted as quickly as they can, given the unfortunate situation with the previous Bill, to bring this piece of legislation back individually, notwithstanding the election interrupting the previous
It is to see so many colleagues discussing a matter that matters to a relatively speedy conclusion and how heartening, again, should he have the opportunity. I re-emphasise in the first place.

I will close simply by saying that I hope the Minister will do all he can to avoid this sort of situation arising again, should he have the opportunity. I re-emphasise how good it is that we have been able to bring this matter to a relatively speedy conclusion and how heartening it is to see so many colleagues discussing a matter that otherwise would have passed with relatively little attention. This is a good example of the Government giving real attention to an important matter and acting quickly to correct a court judgment that was never intended by any previous Government. I welcome the actions that the Minister has taken and, as I said previously, that his predecessor has taken. Perhaps weirdly, I welcome, above all, the co-operation of the Opposition in getting on with this ever so quickly. I hope that the constituents who raised this issue with me see that this is an example of action being taken and are genuinely reassured.

Mr Simon Clarke: It was particularly moving to be in here as we heard the sound of the RAF fly-past a few moments ago to mark 100 years of the RAF. It was 100 years ago this month that my great, great uncle John Headlam was killed while serving in the RAF, so it is nice to be able to pay tribute to his service and sacrifice.

We are a nation of gardeners, and it is important to us all that our nursery sector thrives. It is a particular pleasure to see my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Rishi Sunak) on the Front Bench as the Minister today, because my constituency abuts his and it is home to some of the nurseries that I know very well—Cherry Hill and Strikes in Stokesley, which was subject to a recent devastating fire. I know that I speak on behalf of lots of people in my constituency when I say that I hope Strikes is back up and running in its normal place as quickly as possible.

The nursery industry is extremely significant for growing produce for our home market and for ensuring the sustainability of our rural economy. At a time when there is fierce competition from the supermarket and similar sectors, there is no doubt traditional nurseries need all the support they can get that Agricultural land has been exempt from business rates for almost 100 years.

Ben Bradley: I want to pick my hon. Friend up on the point about supporting nurseries and this kind of industry. Does he agree that it would be right for this place to make a plea to our constituents, not just in this area, but across our high streets and in all sorts of other areas, to support independent local businesses such as these nurseries to ensure that they can continue to exist in the future?

Mr Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention and he is right in what he says. That is something people really care about, and people often regard these nurseries as a hub in the local community. They are not just another shop; they are often dearly loved, and this fits with the spirit of the time, when people increasingly want to buy local.

Until recently, the exemption that applied in this case had been assumed to be uncontroversial and would fit with the understanding of both rating valuers and practitioners. That was the situation until the 2015 court judgment in the Tunnel Tech case, which was a great mistake. I am delighted that the Government have taken steps to reverse it, as such judicial activism simply is not appropriate. The Bill will ensure that plant nurseries in buildings will once again benefit from the business rate exemption, which restores the law to the same state in which it existed before the Court of Appeal decision. I am pleased that the Bill will apply retrospectively, so that those nursery grounds in England that have been charged business rates will now be refunded.

The Government should be congratulated on acting so swiftly to rectify this wrong and on demonstrating common sense. This is so clearly the right course of action that there is no controversy anywhere in this House, and the Bill has received full support from the NFU. I pay tribute to the NFU, because I know full well the value of the work it does in supporting farmers in rural East Cleveland. Indeed, I had the pleasure of going on a farm visit with the NFU recently to see Gibson Hall farm and Peter Humphrey. That is exactly the kind of work the NFU does day in, day out, and it should be saluted.

The legislation needs to be viewed in the broader context of the Government’s commitment and keenness to support our agricultural sector and small businesses, especially those in rural areas. Last week, I spoke out about my deep concerns regarding the future of business rates, but it is worth noting that as a result of measures taken by the Government, more than 600,000 small businesses—occupiers of a third of all properties—now pay no business rates at all. The Government doubled small business rate relief to 100% and raised the threshold from £6,000 to £12,000. At the same time, the Government doubled rural rate relief from 50% to 100% for eligible businesses. Such reliefs are hugely welcome for many small businesses in my constituency.

1.30 pm

I am tempted to point out that the opportunity to use the “green shoots of recovery” line is simply too good to pass up in such a debate. It is with absolutely no hesitation that I support the Bill and the Government’s other continuing efforts to ensure that rural small businesses in this country get the best chance to succeed.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I am delighted to speak in support of the Bill. This is a most pertinent time to talk about measures that will aid our worthy horticultural industry—not least because it is the tennis season. In particular, it is the time of that most prestigious of world-class events, Wimbledon. What is even more important about Wimbledon than the tennis, Sir Lindsay? The strawberries. People were wondering how I could get tennis into the debate—

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): But more so the cream.
Rebecca Pow: I have written down in brackets “and cream”. During the tournament last year, more than 166,000 portions of strawberries were served, with cream. That is 33 tonnes of strawberries. Were I not speaking in this debate, I would be at Wimbledon. That is how important I think it is that we get our business through.

Many strawberry plants, like other plants in the horticultural chain, start life being propagated in nursery grounds, which are often the lifeblood of the horticultural industry. They are the hotbed of germination, propagation and cultivation, and we are discussing them because the Bill exempts from non-domestic rates buildings that are, or form part of, a nursery ground, as several hon. Friends have already said. It gives nursery grounds parity with their agricultural counterparts.

The south-west region, where I come from, is a rural region with a good climate for gardening, growing and horticulture, and it supports so many businesses in the sector, not least in Taunton Deane, which is one reason why I particularly wanted to speak in this debate. I also wanted to speak because in a previous life I worked for the National Farmers Union and got quite involved with the horticultural industry, and I was for many years a horticultural and gardening journalist and editor, so this subject is close to my heart.

I certainly appreciate the hard graft—to use a horticultural term—involved in the industry and the very tight margins, especially for those at the start of the chain. It is difficult for them to pass on their costs: they cannot have huge add-ons because they do not deal with the general public. For this small sector of the industry to discover recently that it was to be penalised by having to pay business rates, when previously it had been exempted, like its agricultural counterparts, was a bitter blow.

Let me give some background. Nursery grounds were exempt from non-domestic rates from 1928 until recently when, through one particular court decision, about which we have heard from colleagues, it was found that the exemption was an incorrect application of the law. This was a bolt from the blue and, as can be imagined, caused a huge amount of angst in the nursery industry, which was already up against the tight margins that I mentioned. The Horticultural Trades Association reported that the change would be detrimental to the industry: if nurseries had to pay business rates that they had not paid previously, that would inevitably drive up costs that would be passed on to the consumers at the end of the chain. As Conservatives—we are the party of business—that did not sit easily with us. The HTA reported that some of its members could face bills to the tune of hundreds of thousands of pounds if the situation was not rectified.

I am delighted to say, though, that through the ripening of this small but perfectly formed Bill, the wrong has been righted. The fruitful outcome that we are witnessing today clarifies once and for all that the situation will again be aligned with the previous practice of exemptions. I am particularly pleased to hear that the funds will be backdated, as specified in the Bill. The Bill demonstrates that, in such an instance, where unfairness has so obviously been demonstrated, the Government, particularly the meticulous and attentive Minister, have listened—and they have not just listened but acted.

The Bill is fully in step with the Government’s commitment to a vision of a productive, competitive and sustainable UK agricultural sector, of which horticulture and the plant nursery sector are an important part. In fact, I believe there is great scope for the industry to grow and blossom, particularly as we exit the EU. With the right back-up, such as that demonstrated through this Bill, there is an opportunity to grow more of our plant material at home, to fuel our landscaping and ornamental plant industry, thereby avoiding the inherent plant disease and pest threats that are associated with importing plants for this trade. For example, we hear a great deal about the disease xylella, which is wiping out olive trees and many other herbaceous and woody commercial plants in Europe. We do not want that in the UK.

After the granting of Taunton’s new and most welcome garden town status, designated through the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, I am working to see more trees included in our townscape. Would it not be wonderful if, at the same time as improving the environment and people’s health and wellbeing, along with all the other benefits that we get from trees, those trees were home-grown, so that the economy benefits at the same time?

Let me touch on the idea of growing the whole horticultural industry and why it is important to put in place measures such as the Bill to stimulate the industry. It is thought that there is great scope to grow the industry, perhaps by as much as an incredible £18 billion. In fact, tomorrow the all-party group on gardening and horticulture is holding an inquiry into how we can skill up the industry and what we need to do to make that happen. There is consensus from the Horticultural Trades Association that if the gross value added—that is, the goods and services that emanate from the diverse horticultural and gardening industry—was measured, which it currently is not, it would demonstrate exactly how valuable the sector is to the economy. It would then be easier to make a case for putting in the right measures, including research and development and so on, to grow the sector.

This small but perfectly formed Bill rights an injustice relating to the imposition of business rates on a special sector of the important horticultural industry, one of the very veins of the supply chain. In so doing, it benefits the industry by not saddling it with an unwelcome property tax and thus helps all those who work in the trade and the whole economy, by giving back to the industry one of the benefits that it needs to thrive. It will have particular resonance throughout the south-west, so I fully support the Bill.

Rishi Sunak: It is a pleasure to respond briefly to the various points raised. I thank my opposite number, the hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon), for the typically constructive way he has approached this type of legislation; of course, we do not agree on everything, but it is fantastic to be able to move these relatively technical matters through the House speedily.

The hon. Gentleman expressed, as he has before, a specific concern about whether the presence of an automated teller machine in a convenience store could take the rateable value of that small shop above the threshold for small business rate relief. Having looked into the matter, I am delighted to tell him that we do not believe that that should be the case. If an ATM is rateable, it would appear as a separate assessment on
the ratings list and the ratepayer would typically be the financial institution that operates the ATM, not the shop itself. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing the specific issues with the Association of Convenience Stores to ensure that its concerns are investigated and addressed.

The hon. Gentleman turned to the important topic of high streets. I know that all of us in this House celebrate our local high streets; they are vital parts not just of our communities, but of our economies. I am very pleased to tell him that my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Jake Berry) is the Minister for high streets and is fully focused on the issue at hand through the Future High Streets Forum. More excitingly, he has just launched the Great British High Street Awards 2018. I will do a plug and call on all Members to nominate their local high streets. Nominations are open until the end of August. The Last iteration of the competition saw almost 1,000 entries from across the country and hundreds of thousands of votes from the public to choose the eventual winner. There is a considerable cash prize on offer for the winner and, indeed, a new rising star category. The winner will also receive expert advice from industry professionals. I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows that we take the issue of high streets very seriously indeed.

Let me touch briefly on some of the other contributions. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) should take enormous pride in the role that he has played in ensuring that we are discussing this important issue today. Hopefully, this legislation will eventually receive Royal Assent and that will be in no small part owing to his efforts to put this issue on the agenda of Ministers, and he deserves enormous credit for that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Nuneaton (Mr Jones), who had this job before me, put in motion the Bill that we are discussing today and engaged with my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay on this important topic, ensuring that when I arrived in the Department this agenda was ready to take forward, and he also deserves credit for that. It is always intimidating to have to respond to him in this Chamber, as I am always reminded that so well did he do this job before I inherited it that the job had to be split between two different people. The Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mrs Wheeler), sits beside me on the Bench. The two of us together do our best to replicate what he did before us and we are grateful that he left everything in such good shape for us to pick up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Matt Warman) has been a stalwart in speaking about business rate tweaks. I join him in hoping that there are far fewer of these to come in the immediate future, but thank him for his support of the Bill. He spoke eloquently about defending the rural interests in his constituency, which will benefit from this Bill, as he did when we enabled business rates relief for new fibre installations, a topic that is dear to his heart and which he pushed hard for. He should shortly be seeing the benefits of that policy in action across the country.

My constituency neighbour, my good hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland (Mr Clarke), has, as I know at first hand, a very mixed constituency. As ever, he did an excellent and eloquent job in talking about the importance of small businesses across Teesside and the efforts that this Government have put in place to ensure that the tax burden on those small businesses is as low as possible. I welcome his support for the £10 billion-worth of measures to alleviate the burden of business rates on small enterprises across Teesside. I am glad that they are benefiting from that. In the rural part of his constituency in East Cleveland, the agricultural community will, I am sure, welcome his support and lobbying for this measure as it can ensure that its productivity remains high in the months and years to come.

What better place to end than with my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow)? As ever, she gave us a brilliant defence and a brilliant celebration of our rural economy and everything that it contributes to our national life. We are, of course, grateful to her for gracing us with her presence today, when she could have been at Wimbledon enjoying the strawberries, the Pimms, the cream and everything else on offer. I must say that, when it comes to slipping strawberies, the Whips than I do, as my previous requests for various exemptions for cricket matches and tennis matches were firmly denied, so I have something to take up with the Whips in due course.

I am glad that we have had a very constructive discussion today and that there is widespread support for this particular clause.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. As indicated on the Order Paper, the Speaker has certified that the Bill relates exclusively to England and Wales on matters within devolved legislative competence. As the Bill has not been amended, there is no change to that certification. Copies of the certificate and the consent motion are available in the Vote Office. Under Standing Order No. 83M, a consent motion is required for the Bill to proceed. Does the Minister intend to move the consent motion?

Rishi Sunak indicated assent.

The House forthwith resolved itself into the Legislative Grand Committee (England and Wales) (Standing Order No. 83M).

[SIR LINDSAY HOYLE IN THE CHAIR]

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I beg to move that the Legislative Grand Committee do sit in private.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): As we both know, you cannot move that motion at this stage.

David Linden: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Can you clarify that the reason that I cannot move that motion is because I am a Scottish MP and have been rendered a second-class Member of the House as a result of English votes for English laws?
The Chairman: Mr Linden, you may wish to judge yourself as a second-class Member, but let me reassure you that I will always treat you as a first-class Member. On that basis, you will still not get your way.

I remind the House that only Members representing constituencies in England and Wales may vote on the consent motion. I call the Minister to move the consent motion.

Motion made, and Question proposed,
That the Committee consents to the Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill.—[Rishi Sunak.]

David Linden: It is a great honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Lindsay, and, indeed, it is a pleasure to serve on this esteemed Legislative Grand Committee of England and Wales. I look forward to making a few observations on the Bill, which has been certified by Mr Speaker as competent for EVEL. It is of course a real pity that, should the Bill divide the Legislative Grand Committee, I and my hon. Friends from Scotland will be excluded from having our vote counted. Indeed, Scottish colleagues have to endure the immense indignity of being ordered by Government Whips to trapse through the Lobby to have their vote discounted in person. It is all incredibly sad. My immense sadness in this regard is founded upon the view that, during the Scottish independence referendum of 2014 and indeed after it, we the people of Scotland were told that Scotland is an equal partner of the United Kingdom. The Secretary of State for Scotland might have strayed off that line a couple of weeks ago, but I am sure that that was a mere oversight on his part.

Today, we have been relegated from legislators to narrators, and so can only speak in the Legislative Grand Committee—and speak I certainly will. Before I continue with my remarks, let me say that I am conscious of being the Member who has spoken the most in this Committee, I and my hon. Friends from Scotland will 875 876

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I just want to note the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) is unable to be here, as he is in the Scottish Affairs Committee. Unfortunately, that brings my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) closer to beating his record of being the Member who has spoken the most often in the Legislative Grand Committee. The ironic thing is that Members from England and Wales never actually speak in the English Legislative Grand Committee.

David Linden: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that powerful intervention. Perhaps today we might find that Members from English constituencies will rise to speak, but I would not necessarily hold my breath for that.

When I first looked at the Order Paper last week and saw that we were debating the Non-Domestic Rating (Nursery Grounds) Bill, I excitedly and somewhat naively thought that this was about nurseries in the sense of toddlers and early years. There was I planning to come to the Legislative Grand Committee to talk about the SNP Scottish Government’s childcare revolution.

I should declare an interest: my three-year-old son, Isaac, starts nursery next month and is thoroughly looking forward to starting Sgoil Arainn Lyoncross. The incredibly good news about that childcare revolution is something that will be welcome from Shetland to Shetland.

Of course, had the Bill been about nurseries in the early years sense, I could have regaled the House with some wonderful nursery rhymes, such as my favourite, “The Grand Old Duke of York.” It rather reminds me of the right hon. and learned Member for Beaconsfield (Mr Grieve), with regard to Brexit, particularly the lines,

“He marched them up to the top of the hill,
And he marched them down again.”

Alas, the House will have to wait for another day to hear me pontificate about nurseries and nursery rhymes.

Instead today, we have the delight of discussing non-domestic rates for nurseries of a plant variety, and what a treat that is.

The Bill’s purpose is to reverse the effect on valuation practice for non-domestic rating of the 2015 case, Tunnel Tech v Reeves. In brief—I shall try to be brief, because I know other Members want to get on to other business soon—the case established that, where a business operates a plant nursery or nursery ground where agricultural operations take place entirely indoors, it cannot benefit from the general business rates exemption for agricultural land and buildings. The Government made a policy commitment to legislate to establish that nursery grounds should be entitled to an agricultural exemption and to apply that exemption retrospectively, back to the 2015-16 financial year.

The Legislative Grand Committee will doubtless be aware that, on 9 July 2015, the Court of Appeal gave judgment in the case of Tunnel Tech v Reeves. I am sure that all members of this esteemed Legislative Grand Committee will have read in full that judgment from the Court of Appeal. The case concerned the rateability of a property occupied by the company Tunnel Tech in Stockbridge, Hampshire. The property was used for growing mushrooms from spores. I myself absolutely abhor mushrooms and feel that they can really ruin a rather good lasagne, but I do not want to digress too much from the subject at hand.

A mixed material was fermented and then used to fertilise “mushroom mycelium grown through sterlised wheat or rye grain produced in laboratory conditions”. After 20 days, mushroom tendrils have grown within the material. It is very interesting that, at that point, Tunnel Tech removed the material and transferred it to specialist mushroom farms. I have never had the pleasure of visiting a mushroom farm myself, but I am only
young. [Interruption.] I am glad to hear that the hon. Member for Ogmore (Chris Elmore) has visited a mushroom farm. Perhaps he might extend an invite to me to visit one in his constituency. I am still relatively young; there is plenty of time left to visit mushroom farms in my life.

The court found that the property in that case was liable for business rates because the mushrooms were produced in order to be sold on to complete the cultivation process elsewhere, not direct to consumers, and because of that, the property did not attract an agricultural exemption. In rating terms, it was a “nursery ground” and not a “market garden”. It is very important that the Legislative Grand Committee takes that seriously.

The Valuation Office Agency rating manual defines a nursery ground as

“land in, or on which, young or immature trees and/or young plants are reared (not necessarily being grown in the actual soil of the nursery) until fit for transplanting or sale: the emphasis on young plants should be noted. Even though plants are raised in containers on the land rather than by rootstock in the soil, such ‘grounds’ should be treated as exempt.”

The rating manual defines a market garden as

“a holding cultivated wholly or mainly for the production of vegetables, fruit and flowers for sale in the course of a trade or business.”

The definitions are used for internal guidance purposes by the VOA and do not have the force of law, but they are based in part on case law discussions of the definitions of those terms.

On Second Reading, the Minister—who I know is playing very close attention to my remarks today—said:

“A nursery ground is where small plants or trees are propagated or grown with a view to their being sold on to someone else for growing on to their mature state, for sale to or use by the end consumer, whereas a market garden”—this is where there is a differentiation—

“is where fruit, vegetables, flowers or plants are produced to be sold directly or indirectly to members of the public for consumption.”—[Official Report, 5 June 2018; Vol. 642, c. 259.]

Agricultural land has been exempt from business rates since 1929. I do not want to test the patience of the Committee too much by going back to 1929. The Committee will be relieved to know that I do not plan to do that. However, areas within an agricultural property that are used for farm diversification such as a farm shop or holiday accommodation on what was previously a farm are liable for business rates. The current legislative authority for that can be found in schedule 5 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. I am sure that all members of the Legislative Grand Committee have paid close attention to that. Before that, agricultural land had been subject to a 75% discount on rates from 1923, a 50% discount for poor law rates and a 75% discount for sanitary-related rates from 1896, known as partial derating.

I am really only clearing my throat at the moment, but I am conscious that scores of other right hon. and hon. Members, especially for English constituencies, will wish to contribute to the Legislative Grand Committee of England and Wales.

Patrick Grady: Before my hon. Friend comes to a conclusion, I want to reflect on his earlier point about “nurseries” and “nurseries”. It is a good opportunity to pay tribute to the Children’s Wood in my constituency, an outdoor play facility that hosts a nursery for young children but also has an allotment that in itself is a nursery for vegetables. It shows that the two things can be brought together and serve important educational purposes, and we should pay tribute to that kind of thing.

David Linden: I do not want my hon. Friend to think that I am coming to the end of my remarks too early. I am only a third of the way through. He is right to pay tribute to the organisations in his constituency, and while I have the floor, I pay tribute to Eddie Andrews of Connect Community Trust in the Wellhouse area of my constituency, who does a sterling job of looking after that allotment. There is a long-standing problem that allotments have not been given the focus that they require, especially in Glasgow. We now have an SNP Administration—

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. Perhaps I can help. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that he needs an Adjournment debate, he should apply for one on allotments, because obviously we will not be discussing that as part of today’s debate.

David Linden: I am grateful for your guidance, Sir Lindsay. That is much appreciated. I am conscious that scores of MPs from English constituencies will wish to take part in this important Legislative Grand Committee. Members fought for it for a long time; it was the English Parliament. I expect to see hundreds of MPs rush into the Chamber to get to their feet and make their voice heard. There is still time for that, but I shall return to my own remarks.

Tunnel Tech sought to argue that its use of the property constituted that of a market garden. The term “market garden” has no statutory definition, but using several examples of case law, it argued that a hereditament is a market garden if any part of a process of horticulture is carried on there with a view to ultimate consumption by the public, even though the produce of the hereditament is not itself, when it leaves the hereditament, an article capable of consumption by the public or indeed intended for consumption by the public. For the purposes of time, I will not read out the full 2015 judgment; the Chairman is indicating that he would prefer me not to read it out. The judgment found that Tunnel Tech’s use of the property meant that it constituted a plant nursery and not a market garden. The produce of a market garden is suitable for direct or indirect sale to consumers, whereas the produce of a plant nursery is not. I found that fascinating when I read the briefing note for this.

This distinction was important because Tunnel Tech’s operations took place entirely within the buildings. The provision for the exemption of agricultural buildings is found in paragraph 3 of schedule 5 to the 1988 Act. It says, and it is important that the Committee understands this:

“A building is an agricultural building if it is not a dwelling and—

(a) it is occupied together with agricultural land and is used solely in connection with agricultural operations on the land”
or

(b) it is or forms part of a market garden and is used solely in connection with agricultural operations at the market garden.”
[David Linden]

The 2015 judgment noted that paragraph (b) does not include plant nurseries in the definition of agricultural buildings. It is important that we make that distinction. Therefore, a plant nursery that is located entirely indoors does not constitute an agricultural building and is not exempt from business rates. I am a frequent visitor to garden centres and there is one in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows). We in the SNP Whips Office have been there before to enjoy some tea and cake and I commend the garden centre to anyone visiting central Scotland.

It is worth noting that garden centres, including those calling themselves nurseries—I ran an election campaign from English constituencies will be wishing to take part had better not. I know that countless hon. Members from English constituencies will be wishing to take part in this Legislative Grand Committee of England and Wales, so I shall conclude by thanking you for your forbearance, Sir Lindsay, and wishing this Bill a very speedy passage when it goes to their noble lordships.

I can see that some colleagues are getting a bit impatient at the length of my remarks—[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) says, “Carry on!” I am tempted but I know that countless hon. Members receive Royal Assent. Question put and agreed to.

The occupant of the Chair left the Chair to report the decision of the Committee (Standing Order No. 83M(6)). The Deputy Speaker resumed the Chair; decision reported.

Third Reading

2.1 pm

Rishi Sunak: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I thank all hon. and right hon. Members who have contributed at the various stages of the Bill in supporting the measures involved and highlighting the contribution that it makes towards furthering the Government’s ambitions to support agricultural and horticultural productivity. I am grateful to the Clerks of the House and for the work done by the officials both in DEFRA and in my own Department.

I thank the National Farmers Union for its strong support for the Bill. We have worked closely with the NFU to make sure that nurseries benefit from the exemption in the Bill. I am grateful for its invaluable insight and expertise, which has helped to bring these effective measures to the House.

This Bill is just a small part of how the Government are using the business rates system to create opportunity and drive growth across the country. It has wide support, restores a long-standing policy position, and will support a vibrant and sustainable rural economy. I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Opposition Day

[UN-ALLOTED HALF DAY]

Leaving the EU: Negotiations

2.2 pm

Sir Vince Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the Government’s negotiations to leave the EU have not progressed to the satisfaction of the people of the UK, with polls indicating that 69 per cent of the people now believe the Brexit process is going badly; calls on the Government to engage in cross-party discussions with a view to establishing a government of national unity; and further believes that the people of the UK should have the final say on the UK’s relationship with the EU through a people’s vote on the deal.

It is a pleasure to be able to introduce this Liberal Democrat debate on the Government’s handling of the Brexit negotiations, the pleasure being greater because the opportunity is rather infrequent. I am aware that the House has had a pretty unremitting diet of Brexit, Brexit and more Brexit, but we judge that another helping is necessary because of the events that have taken place over the past few days. Yesterday we had an opportunity to question the Prime Minister on the Chequers agreement, but this debate gives Members an opportunity to develop their arguments in rather greater detail.

Of course, all of this is being discussed in a Westminster bubble, and we will frequently be reminded that there is such a thing as the popular will. However, the popular will, as manifested in surveys of public opinion, suggests that at present about 70% of the public judge that the Government are handling the Brexit negotiations badly, and that figure has been on an increasing trend for pretty much the past year.

A lot of that disillusionment has to do with the way in which members of the Government have been conducting themselves. Over the past few days, we have had a treasure trove of quotations from senior members of the Government about what they really think about the Government’s negotiating position.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): It would be seriously disrespectful and utterly counter productive to have another referendum. Talking about quotations, does the right hon. Gentleman agree with himself?

Sir Vince Cable: I am perfectly happy to respect the referendum that we have had, but it is utterly respectful, and quite common practice in many countries, to have a confirmatory referendum when a Government have produced a deal. That is good constitutional practice and good politics, and Liberal Democrat Members argue for it strongly.

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): My right hon. Friend will of course remember that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) proposed exactly the same course of action whereby one could have an initial referendum and another that confirmed it later on. Does he agree with the right hon. Gentleman?
Sir Vince Cable: Yes, I think that most members of the Government, at various points, have subscribed to that perfectly correct constitutional position.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the announcement that there was to be a second referendum would influence the negotiating position of our counterparts? Would it incline them to be more forthcoming with the negotiations?

Sir Vince Cable: Since we are being pedantic about numbers, we are actually talking about the third referendum on this subject. The impact on the European negotiators would, I am sure, be absolutely negligible. They are fully aware of the chaotic and disorganised position of the Government and defining their negotiating position on that basis.

I turn to what senior members of the Government felt about the policy that is now being put forward. A couple of days ago, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), as I suppose we should now learn to call him, spoke to The Mail on Sunday, which I know from experience to be a very reliable newspaper, describing the Government’s policy as being like “polishing a turd”. He was also reported to have met the former Prime Minister—his fellow old Etonian—to discuss the problem a few days ago: the two gentlemen who have probably done more than anything else to precipitate the chaos we now have. Between them, they agreed that the Government had produced “the worst of all worlds”.

In the slightly more dignified language of his resignation letter, the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip described Brexit as “dying” and Britain being reduced to the status of a “colony”—less than an overwhelming vote of support for the Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) expressed his argument in somewhat more measured terms, saying that we have reached a point where we will be exiting the European Union in name only. If that is indeed what is happening, why on earth is Brexit proceeding, and can we not find a way out of it?

The striking thing about the comments that resigning members of the Government have made is the way in which they are managing to poison their own well. It is extraordinary the extent to which the word “betrayal” is entering the narrative. We risk getting to a point in a few months’ time—if Brexit happens; I think it is an if rather than a when—where the many people who regard Brexit as a disastrous error will be pointing out the many problems that arise from it, while those who have devoted their lives to fighting for Brexit will be arguing that it is a disaster because it is a betrayal. If Brexit day ever happens, it will be a day of mourning, and it is very difficult to see where the positive story is going to come from to help the country to turn over a new leaf.

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): Talking of betrayal, the previous Member for Sheffield, Hallam campaigned for a “real referendum on Europe” before the 2010 general election. A 2008 leaflet stated: “It’s been over thirty years since the British people last had a vote on Britain’s membership of the European Union...Whether you agree with Europe or not, it is vital that you and the British people have your say in a real EU referendum.”

We have had that referendum. I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that the people have had their say and we have to abide by it.

Sir Vince Cable: My party has never had any problem with the idea of having referendums on the European question. We have always argued that on questions of major constitutional change—for example, entry into the monetary union or signing the Lisbon treaty, which has already happened—it is appropriate to have a referendum. It is common practice in many EU countries to proceed in that way, and we have no objection to it. We argue that there must be a proper process, which involves consulting the public on the general principle—that has happened, and there was a narrow majority one way—and then having a confirmatory referendum at the end to decide whether it is a satisfactory way to proceed.

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I understand that the reason many people voted leave in the referendum was that they were fed up with the establishment telling them all the time that it knew better and that their voice and opinion did not matter. Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that by making this proposition, the Liberal Democrats are just confirming to those people that they were absolutely right—the Lib Dems think they know better than the people—and that the people’s voice no longer matters to them?

Sir Vince Cable: If people do in fact feel that way, they will presumably vote the same way again. We take the risk that we lose. That is the democratic spirit.

Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): Why did the right hon. Gentleman not take the opportunity to vote for a referendum on the Lisbon treaty?

Sir Vince Cable: We did press for a referendum on the Lisbon treaty, as it happens. That was not the view of a majority in the House at the time, but we had no problem with the concept.

Let me try to be a bit more positive about what the Government are trying to do. The first remark I want to make is about the conduct of the Prime Minister. I was going around the radio and television studios yesterday following Conservative MPs and commentators, none of whom had a good word to say about her. It is important to put on the record that she has pursued her course of action, however misjudged it may be, with a grim determination that is rather heroic. I have some admiration for the way in which she is going about her job. She may be wrong, but she is pursuing it in a rather steadfast way.

The second point I will make is about the content of the Government’s announcement. It is clearly an advance on where they were before. There is a recognition now that the Irish border question has to be addressed and that there has to be frictionless trade for industrial and agricultural products. That is now understood. The Government appear to have heard the message from the Jaguar Land Rovers of this world, which have complex supply chains, that it is not possible to stay in the UK if there is interruption of trade, so industrial and agricultural products will have to flow freely.
[Sir Vince Cable]

There is also an implicit acknowledgment that the default position of crashing out of the European Union is less and less plausible, and the reason for that is the changing international environment created by our visitor on Friday. The idea that the UK can fall back on World Trade Organisation rules in the default position is made increasingly untenable by the fact that the WTO has progressively less authority. The United States is not willing to abide by its rulings or to staff its judicial panels. As an organisation, it is completely hollow. Were we to fall back on WTO rules, we would effectively be falling back on anarchy. There is at least some recognition in Government of the dangers of that approach.

Those are the positive things. There is one other positive achievement by default, which is that the Government have effectively scuppered any prospect of reaching a bilateral trade agreement with the United States.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con) indicated dissent.

Sir Vince Cable: Well, there are Members of the House—I am one, and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) is another—who have experience of dealing with the United States through negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Several things were very clear. First, although the United States is important, it is considerably less important than the European Union in terms of our trade—it is about 18% versus 43% of our exports. There are undoubtedly some benefits to be obtained through a completely free trading arrangement with the United States; for example, there are few high-tariff points. However, by far the largest obstacle is public procurement, which is decided in the United States at state level, not federal level. The potential benefits of opening the US market are actually very limited.

The key point is that the United States made it very clear then and is now making it even clearer that it is only interested in entering into a bilateral trade agreement if it opens the market to American agriculture. That is not compatible with the Government’s commitment to maintain the regulatory rulebook on food safety and agricultural products. It is to the Government’s credit that they have agreed to do that, but it almost certainly makes it impossible to reach a trade agreement. Indeed, Wilbur Ross, the Trump Administration appointee, has made it clear that the United States will not enter into serious negotiations if freer agriculture for foodstuffs is not permitted.

Stephen Lloyd (Eastbourne) (LD): On that basis, is not one of the challenges that the severe Brexiteers never mention the fact that the Americans use a great deal of chlorine in the preservation of food, and unless we have a proper regulatory framework, as we do currently, there is a real danger that those kinds of foodstuffs will come into the United Kingdom?

Sir Vince Cable: Yes. There is a whole series of well-known instances relating to beef hormones, genetically modified foods and chlorinated chickens. I do not know how well based the arguments are scientifically, but clearly that will demand a repudiation of those European standards. The Government’s stance—again, this is a positive—makes it clear that concessions cannot now be given on those items and that it will be impossible to reach a trade agreement with the Trump Administration in practice, if not in theory.

The negatives are even clearer than the positives. One of them is the sheer workability of the arrangements. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden has said quite categorically that the arrangements he has been involved in designing for months are simply unworkable, and it is very clear that that is the case. If we have a differential tariff system, it is very cumbersome to enforce. There is an obvious temptation to smuggle. A company producing within the European Union but not in the UK will import through the UK at a lower tariff, and it would be necessary to have a sophisticated tracking system to identify where the product has gone. In complex supply chains with hundreds of widgets flying backwards and forwards, it is impossible to see how that could be done in practice. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden was well aware of that, and the European Commission is well aware of it, which is why it almost certainly will not pass to the next stage.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I sit on the Public Accounts Committee, and last February we went to Washington, where we had private briefings with State Department representatives about the trade deal. They were very clear that we must be absolutely clear about, for example, country of origin rules and that they do not want a part of a small trade deal—they will not “do skinny”, in their words. If that was their case last February, what does my right hon. Friend think they are making of the chaos of this Government now?

Sir Vince Cable: The European Union over many years has developed a sophisticated rules of origin system in order to develop an answer to precisely the problems presented by the complex nature of modern trade. They are quite right to say that in an environment of uncertainty, there is very little merit in pursuing an agreement.

The other major disadvantage of what the Government are proposing is, as several Members pointed out yesterday, the complete neglect of the services sector. It is not just 80% of the British economy, but includes extremely important industries—notably financial services, but also creative industries, the digital sector and entertainment, and of course much manufacturing happens through services exports. Rolls-Royce earns as much from its maintenance contracts as it does from selling its engines. When we send cars to the European Union, we sell them with a package attached to financial services. It is not at all clear how the Government propose to unscramble those very complicated relationships.

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Does my right hon. Friend remember that when I was junior Minister to him as Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, we spent a long time arguing for more liberalisation of services, because it was in the UK’s interest to widen and deepen the services market in the EU? Is it not therefore ironic that a Conservative Government want to turn their back on service liberalisation and put up barriers? We could not get a more anti-business approach from the Conservative party.
Sir Vince Cable: It is a lot more than ironic, because this goes back a long way. There has been consensus among successive Governments, starting with Mrs Thatcher and Lord Cockburn through the Blair Government and the coalition Government, on accepting that services exports to the European Union were a major objective of British Government policy. I recall being sent to Berlin and elsewhere to denounce the Germans for their failure to open up their market for services trade and the mutual recognition of qualifications. For example, European countries currently decline to accept British ski instructors, as they do not have mutual recognition of qualifications. A great deal has, however, been achieved, and the Government are now inclined to turn their back on it.

The reasons the Prime Minister advanced for doing so yesterday are partly simply foolish and partly bogus. The folly lies in saying that any services transaction that involves people crossing the border, however valuable, is adding to our net immigration target and is therefore unacceptable, regardless of the economic merit. The bogus argument is to say that this is a problem within the European Union, but it is not going to be a problem if we have trade deals with other countries, because we will be able to proceed with services agreements with them.

However, we already know from the two failed attempts so far to negotiate an outline agreement with India that services trade, wherever it is—within the European Union or outside it—involves the free movement of people, and the Indians are insisting that if we are to have a bilateral trade agreement with them, part of the package will be importing Indian services in the form of IT consultants and much else. If we look around the other big emerging markets—Brazil, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria—we can see that what they have to export is people. This is going to be an enormous obstacle to the Government reaching any kind of agreement with any country outside the European Union.

Sir Edward Davey: My right hon. Friend is being generous in giving way yet again. Does he remember that when he and I served on a Cabinet Committee looking at trade, we pushed just the arguments that he is now making, and the one person getting in the way of those arguments was the then Home Secretary—now the Prime Minister—who stopped a major trade deal that would be in this country’s interests?

Sir Vince Cable: That is exactly right, and the current numbers suggest that a substantial majority believe that there should be a vote on the final deal.

If the Government were totally rational, they would see the arguments for doing so from their own point of view. The Prime Minister could say, “I’ve done the best I can to achieve a deal. It’s obviously difficult with the Conservative party in disarray, but I’ve done the best I can. I have negotiated hard with the European Union”—we would all believe that, because she is obviously conscientious—“and this is what I’ve got. Do you, the public, who voted for this originally, want to accept it, or would you rather stay where are and be in the European economic union?” That would be a perfectly honourable and sensible way for her to proceed politically, and it is constitutionally sensible. It reflects the fact that conditions have changed enormously since the original vote. I strongly recommend that approach to the House, and I look forward to hearing contributions from Members on both sides of the House in this debate on the Chequers statement.

2.25 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Deputy Speaker.

The way in which we exit the EU has already been subject to a great deal of debate in this place and of course outside it, but the Government’s resolve is absolutely clear. We are respecting the result of the referendum, and we are delivering Brexit. There will be no second referendum. As the Prime Minister said yesterday:

“This House and this Parliament gave the British people the vote. The British people made their choice and they want their Government to deliver on that choice.”—[Official Report, 9 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 721.]

I fear that today’s motion reflects an ongoing pattern of trying to talk down the achievements that have been made, despite evidence to the contrary. We were told...
that we would not reach a deal on sufficient progress last December—we did. We were told that we would not reach a deal on an implementation period in March—we did. I remind the House that the negotiations so far have settled virtually all of the withdrawal agreement, and the implementation period we have agreed will provide businesses and citizens with time to prepare for our future relationship with the EU.

Chloe Smith: I respect the right hon. Gentleman enormously and to some extent I regard him as a friend, but I also recall that from time to time he indulges in pantomime in his constituency, and that may be the case today if he is arguing that we ought to be out of a policy that he in fact believes we should be in. I do not think that his is the consistent position.

Domestically, we have passed legislation preparing us for Brexit, such as the Nuclear Safeguards Act 2018, the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 and, most recently, the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration Bill has also completed its passage through Parliament.

I am sure we will hear speeches claiming that a second referendum is the democratic thing to do, but that is not the case. The issue has been thoroughly democratically tested. Let me run through the ways. In the run-up to the 2015 general election, the Conservative party’s manifesto stated:

“We will...give you a say over whether we should stay in or leave the EU, with an in-out referendum”.

It quite clearly did not say there would be one referendum at the start of negotiations and another at the end. That manifesto commitment was given statutory footing through the European Union Referendum Act 2015, which specified there would be one referendum, not two. To recap so far, there was an election-winning manifesto and an Act was passed through this House, but perhaps that is not democratic enough for the Lib Dems.

As this House well knows, the referendum held on 23 June 2016 saw a majority of people voting to leave the EU. That was the biggest single democratic act in British history. Following that, the House of Commons voted, with a clear majority, to authorise the Prime Minister to trigger article 50, by passing the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017. As hon. Members know very well, amendments were tabled requesting a referendum to ratify the deal negotiated with the EU. One such amendment, in the name of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), was defeated by a margin in excess of 10:1. That was democracy in action once again.

There is more in the democratic treasure trove. In last year’s general election, more than 80% of voters supported the Conservative and Labour parties. Both parties’ manifestos committed to respecting the result of the referendum. Let us not forget how many voters supported the position of the Liberal Democrats, whose manifesto called for that second referendum: 7.4% of them.

Most recently, of course, there has been the passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, where amendments attempting to secure a second referendum surfaced once again. One, in the name of the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), was defeated by a margin in excess of 13:1, yet he still has an appetite for this old democracy idea.

Caroline Lucas: What the Minister does not appear to appreciate is that the referendum was a vote about departure, not destination—it could not be about destination because the leaders of the Brexit campaign never set out what the destination would look like. It is as if people who had been offered a wonderful mansion had ended up with a hovel with faulty wiring and a leaking roof. Does she not agree that they have the right to another say—the first say, in fact, on the actual detail? There has been no detail in anything that the Government have put forward so far.

Chloe Smith: I will tell you what I think the British people have the right to, Mr Deputy Speaker: trust in their politicians. As the Prime Minister said herself, this is about more than the decision to leave the EU; it is about whether the public can trust their politicians to put in place the decision that they took.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): The Minister mentioned trust, and that is very important. The simple fact is that all we have heard from the Liberal Democrats and the Green in the Chamber today is that they do not trust the people. Regardless of what they say, if we had a second referendum and they got the wrong result again, they would want a third, fourth or a fifth referendum—they would keep going until they got the result they wanted because they do not believe in democracy.

Chloe Smith: I respect my hon. Friend’s intervention. I fear that such an approach would not be one of principle, and he is right to highlight it. Rather than undermine the British people’s democratic decision to leave the EU, let us get on and make a success of it.

Graham Stringer: On this point at least, the Minister is making a great deal of sense. Does she agree that the Lib Dems are more interested in being good supporters of the EU than in being democrats? They are following the long tradition of the European Union, exemplified by referendums in Ireland. When the Irish people voted against various constitutional amendments, they keep having to vote until they get the right answer—the one that the EU wants. That is the policy that the Lib Dems are supporting now—“Keep voting until you agree with us.”

Chloe Smith: I agree. Such an approach would be deeply unprincipled. What Government Members and all those who believe in the referendum decision want is the right deal for Britain. That is what we seek to achieve and what the Prime Minister set out yesterday.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): I want to understand something. The Minister says that the Government are going to deliver the will of the people on Brexit, yet the two leading proponents of Brexit have
walked from the Cabinet because they do not support the Government’s position. How can the Minister argue that the Government are delivering what the people voted for in the referendum?

Chloe Smith: The Government is comprised of people in the Cabinet, and the Cabinet is delivering what the Prime Minister set out yesterday.

David T. C. Davies (Monmouth) (Con): Not only did we have a referendum, but we had a general election in which more than 85% of the public voted for Brexit-supporting parties. Around 5% voted for the Liberal Democrats. What right do they have to tell us what the people are thinking? The people are certainly not agreeing with the Lib Dems.

Chloe Smith: What we should do is trust the people themselves. Is that not the fundamental point? Their decision in 2016 was not made quickly after just a few weeks; it was made in the context of years of debate on the subject. The idea that they were able to take that decision was what governed the ability to have a referendum. To suggest that some people were wrong or misinformed, or made a choice that has to be reversed, does people down, does trust in politics down, does our country down and does our democracy down terribly.

The referendum question was agreed by Parliament and presented to the people with no conditions or caveats, but with a promise from the Government that we would implement what they chose. We should be coming together and getting on with it.

Sir Edward Davey: I am grateful to the Minister for being generous in giving way. What is her estimate of when the Brexit deal will be done? What will be the date?

Chloe Smith: In case anybody in this place is still somehow, miraculously, unclear on the matter, we will be leaving European Union in March 2019—and so will the Liberal Democrats, whether they like it or not.

I turn to a few more points about Parliament. To try to undermine the result of the referendum by saying that it was somehow wrong does down Parliament, because it was Parliament that gave the decision to the people. We have always been committed to keeping Parliament fully involved in the process of leaving the EU and in determining the shape of the future relationship that we want to achieve. We have said consistently, and demonstrated through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which has just gained Royal Assent, that Parliament will have a vote on the final deal reached with the EU before it is concluded. That is now legally established. Members will have the choice to accept or reject the final agreement. That, and not a second referendum, should be the decisive vote. Let us give Parliament its rightful role.

I turn to the motion, which deserves a little attention. As the Liberal Democrat leader noted in his opening remarks, Liberal Democrat motions do not come along too often, although they are always a pleasure when they do. I am a little perplexed about why the motion calls for a second referendum in light of the record of the Liberal Democrats. We have probably all seen the classic Liberal Democrat leaflets that say one thing to one street and something else to another, but people cannot do that in Parliament. All seven of the Lib Dem MPs then in the House of Commons voted to give the European Union Referendum Bill, which specified one referendum, not two, its Second Reading. The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake), the Liberal Democrat Brexit spokesman, was among their number. Why does he think today that he should change position and say something else in this motion? Maybe that is explained by the behaviour of the Liberal Democrats when article 50 was triggered; let us follow slightly more recent history. I seem to recall that, at the time of that vote, the Liberal Democrats were, frankly, all over the shop—there is no other way to put it.

Let me in passing, however, pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who has just left his place. His constituency is near mine and he is a good man. He was the one Liberal Democrat Member who recognised publicly that his party’s position on Brexit was toxic. He feared that the party was not listening to people and was treating them with disdain. I pay tribute to him for his insight and courage in saying so.

Steve Double: Does the Minister share my view that we should not talk only about Liberal Democrat Members of this House? Liberal Democrat councillors, particularly in places that voted heavily for leave, such as Cornwall, are distancing themselves from their party leadership’s position on a second referendum because they believe that it is so toxic.

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend speaks with experience from Cornwall, in the west country, for which I am delighted to say there is now Conservative representation in Parliament. I hope that he and his colleagues will continue to serve the people of that part of our beautiful country for many years to come.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way, but it does stink a bit of pot and kettle for her to claim that every party but hers is all over the place on this issue. If we are honest, there are divisions in all parties, just as there are in the country. Frankly, I do not agree with her argument that democracy is static. It is a dynamic thing, and there is no reason why people should not change their views as facts change.

May I ask the Minister about one particular fact? I am surprised that no one has taken her up on it. Can she please tell us what the resolution is to the Irish border issue? She wrongly stated that it had been resolved at the December Council. It was not. What is the solution to avoiding a hard border on the island of Ireland? The Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who is sitting next to her, shakes his head. Maybe he can get up and tell us what the resolution is to this issue.

Chloe Smith: My hon. Friend and I were shaking our heads because I did not say what the hon. Gentleman says I did. The Prime Minister’s statement yesterday made it very clear that the deal she proposes to put forward to the EU does address the Irish border question. That is where he will find the answer to his question. Today’s debate, however, is about having a second referendum, and that is what I am responding to.
Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I just indicated assent.

Chloe Smith: The Prime Minister took two hours of questions on the detail yesterday, and I really think there is very little I can add to the understanding of that. I am deeply sorry if the right hon. Gentleman does not yet understand the position, but the Prime Minister did go through it in detail.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): If I interpret correctly what the Minister has just said, I rather fancy that she is making a false correlation between those of us who are perceived as Unionists and support for Brexit. I very luckily won my seat just over a year ago as a self-proclaimed remainer—there was a swing to the Liberal Democrats. I suggest to the Minister, with all due respect, that that was more about a repudiation of any notion of a second independence referendum in Scotland and perhaps a comment on the Scottish Government.

Chloe Smith: I am very happy to hear that argument from the hon. Gentleman. He is correct. I was making a parallel point rather than a correlative point about the need to seek a deal that works for the entire United Kingdom. What I would say is that those who respect the result of one referendum also need to respect the result of another. If the hon. Gentleman thinks highly of the independence referendum result, he might think again about the EU referendum result. If we respect one, it is important to respect the other for the same basic reason, which is that we are all democrats.

Peter Heaton-Jones (North Devon) (Con): I do not know if other Members feel like this, but I feel like we have disappeared down the rabbit hole in “Alice in Wonderland” with the Liberal Democrats’ motion. They are calling for a second referendum, but the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) described those who voted leave in the first referendum as old people driven by nostalgia for a world of white faces. If he has so little regard for the majority of people who voted in referendum one, why on earth would we listen to him about having a second?

Chloe Smith: Those words were hugely to be regretted. They were a great shame. Perhaps we will be able to draw that point out a little more from Liberal Democrat Members in today’s debate.

Returning to the motion, it is a shame that its language overemphasises the point that violence is overblown to say the least. Apparently what we need at the moment is a Government of national unity. The last time we had one of those, if my memory serves me rightly, we were at war. We are, instead, in a constructive negotiation with the European Union. We are not at war with it, nor should we try to be.

Bob Stewart: As someone who commanded a checkpoint on the Northern Ireland border for two years during the hard border times, I point out that it is perfectly easy to have a border that does not require checkpoints. The Swiss border operates using pre-registration and technology, when one goes into Germany or France. Having done it, I can tell the House that that is perfectly possible using today’s technology and pre-registration. It can work.

Chloe Smith: Thank you for speaking from his experience. I will draw my remarks to a close, because many other Members wish to contribute to the debate—at least nine Liberal Democrats and perhaps one or two others.
The Government’s position is clear: we are determined to deliver on the decision of the British people. We are making progress on doing so, and there will not be a second referendum. Surely our focus should all be on making a success of Brexit and getting the best deal possible. It is the Government’s duty to do that. It is the Government’s duty to deliver the will of the people, as asked for in the referendum, and find the right deal for Britain.

2.49 pm

Jenny Chapman (Darlington) (Lab): Even by recent standards, this is a moment of extraordinary political chaos. Within the last 36 hours, the Prime Minister has lost her Brexit Secretary, her Foreign Secretary—although she probably welcomed that as much as the rest of the country did—and she has lost the support of her party. The Chequers proposals are clearly dead in the water, even before the White Paper is published and the EU has had a chance to respond. However, amid the turmoil and turbulence, it is comforting to see that there are still some certainties in politics.

Steve Double: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jenny Chapman: Give me a minute—let me at least get started, and then I promise I will give way. Today, before the House we have a Lib Dem motion calling for a coalition with a discredited Tory Government and a referendum on the EU. This is from a party that propped up the Cameron Government for five years.

Steve Double: Will the shadow Minister remind the House how many shadow Front Benchers the Leader of the Opposition has lost since he has been in post?

Jenny Chapman: We have had our moments, I do not deny it, but we sit here as a shadow Brexit team that is still entirely intact from the date of formation. I look over to the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), who now casts a lonely figure on the Government Front Bench, as the sole survivor on his own team.

The Lib Dems have been calling for a referendum on membership of the EU since 2009—I could find it as far back as that, but it may well go further back than that. The Lib Dems, with their usual political foresight, argued back then that only a real referendum could settle the question of our relationship with the EU once and for all. A decade later, they still think that another referendum is the answer. I am certain that, in 2028, Lib Dem MPs will still be debating whether they should call for another referendum. This motion is a kind of greatest hits of Lib Dem policies over the last decade. I can only assume that an earlier draft had a promise not to raise tuition fees, but that must have been ruled out of scope.

There is no parliamentary majority for the Prime Minister’s cumbersome and costly facilitated customs arrangement and it would be a nightmare for business. It would mean the UK acting as the EU’s customs official and it relies on technology that does not currently exist to make it work. For perhaps the first time in history, I agreed with the now former Foreign Secretary when he described it in his resignation letter as an “impractical and undeliverable customs arrangement unlike any other in existence”, and these are the lengths that the Government have gone to in order to reject a comprehensive customs union.

Tom Brake: First, on the subject of foresight, I draw the hon. Lady’s attention to the fact that the Liberal Democrats had the foresight to oppose the Iraq war unanimously. As for propelling up Governments, I think she needs to look carefully at what her Front Benchers are doing in relation to Brexit. Many people around the country think that she and her colleagues are propelling up the Government. On the question of a national Government—a Government of unity—what we are calling for is the parties that want an exit from Brexit and a final say on the deal to get together and deliver it.

Jenny Chapman: Our Front Benchers’ position is clear: we do not want an exit from Brexit. We respect the outcome of the referendum. I know that the Liberal Democrats do not approve of that position, but that is what it is.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend and her whole team have done a sterling job for the Labour Front Bench. While she is clarifying Labour party policy, could she also clarify from the Dispatch Box that it is not Labour policy to support a second referendum?

Jenny Chapman: I will go on to that later in my speech.

Sir Desmond Swayne: But before she does—

Jenny Chapman: I give way to the right hon. Gentleman.

Sir Desmond Swayne: The hon. Lady spoke of the enormous technical difficulties and the absurdity of us operating as the European Union’s customs official. That is what we do at the moment. We charge tariffs on goods coming from the rest of the world and not from the EU. What is the difference in principle or in technology?

Jenny Chapman: There is a very great difference between what is proposed in the Chequers deal and a comprehensive customs union. We will probably be debating this at great length when the White Paper comes out. I am interested to note the right hon. Gentleman’s support for the Chequers deal—let us see how long that lasts.

The problems with the Chequers proposals go a bit deeper. There are huge holes in wider parts of the proposals, particularly on services, where there is an extraordinary lack of detail, even though services account for 80% of our economy. It is also difficult to see how the proposals would prevent a hard border in Northern Ireland. As we have said time and again, the best way to do that is through a comprehensive customs union and shared institutions and regulations, but the Chequers plan is well short of that. There is also nothing in the proposals to prevent workplace rights, consumer rights and environmental protections lagging behind EU standards over time. Of course, the White Paper—if it gets published—may include more detail, but this is clearly not the credible plan that we need to protect jobs, the economy and rights.
[Jenny Chapman]

This matters, because we all want a Brexit deal that works for Britain and ends the uncertainty that we have seen for two years. Businesses in the north-east and across the country are crying out for that. Whether people voted leave or remain, they are being let down by the chaotic way in which the Government are handling this process, but the two proposals in the motion to address this are not ones that we can support.

The first proposal is for “cross-party discussions with a view to establishing a government of national unity”.

Of course, the Labour party is always open to working across the House to find consensus and to share the Brexit process to protect jobs and the economy. That is precisely how we approached the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and the many amendments that we worked so hard on in both Houses. It is also how we are approaching the key votes on the customs and trade Bills next week.

Again, we have reached out to find common ground, particularly on the case for a new customs union and to keep us close to the single market. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) set out in The Guardian today, this is “an impasse that cannot be resolved by further internal negotiation in the Conservative party...It is now time for the majority in parliament to be heard.”

We believe that this majority would support a close economic relationship with the EU, including a new customs union and the kind of strong single market deal that Labour is putting forward. We will put that to the House in amendments next week and as the process continues, but this motion calls instead for a “government of national unity”—in other words, a coalition. I know that that is the Lib Dems’ answer to any moment of political crisis, but we do not agree.

The proposal in the motion poses more questions than it answers. What would the negotiating mandate of that Government of national unity be? I assume that the Lib Dems would expect to serve in it and would reluctantly take up a ministerial salary and car, but on what basis would that Government operate, and with what mandate? What would the wider policies of that Government be to address the huge challenges that we have in our schools, our NHS and our communities?

Tom Brake: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Jenny Chapman: No. Or would this just be a Brexit Government? Brexit is the most pressing issue facing this country, but it is not the only one, and the public would not thank us for ignoring the many wider issues we need to urgently tackle. I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman if he would still like to intervene.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I wish that she were able to adjust her speech as she was going along, because in an earlier intervention on her, I made it very clear what the purpose of that national unity Government would be. It would be very limited; simply to provide an exit from Brexit and a final say on the deal. That would be its remit—end of story.

Jenny Chapman: I think “end of story” pretty much sums it up actually.

Instead of another Lib Dem coalition, the Prime Minister should first allow votes in this House on her customs proposals, and ours, to see which one has the support of the House. Similarly, she should put her White Paper to a vote and see whether there is a majority for that, and if not, she must accept that her approach has failed. She needs to change the red lines, particularly on a customs union and a close single market deal, or better still, make way for a Government who can deliver the Brexit deal that we need. The sooner she does that and ends the chaos of the last day and a half, the better.

The second proposal in the motion concerns “a people’s vote” on the withdrawal deal. To be absolutely clear and to respond to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), the Labour party is not calling for a second referendum, and we never have. Our manifesto was perfectly clear on this: “Labour accepts the referendum result...We will prioritise jobs and living standards, build a close new relationship with the EU, protect workers’ rights and environmental standards, provide certainty to EU nationals and give a meaningful role to Parliament throughout negotiations.”

We have also said that, should the Prime Minister fail to get a withdrawal agreement through the Commons, or fail to get a deal at all, it would be a moment of real crisis. At that stage, all options should remain on the table, and Parliament should be able to say what happens next. That could take many courses, but it should be Parliament that decides.

Caroline Lucas: The hon. Lady says that the Labour party will support a Brexit that delivers jobs, and all those positive things, but she knows as well as we do that every single economic analysis demonstrates that we are going to be massively worse off as a country if we are not part of the single market and the customs union. Does she not think that those people—for the many, not the few—would actually do an awful lot better if Labour got off the fence and, at the very least, supported a less damaging Brexit than the one it is supporting right now?

Jenny Chapman: The hon. Lady does not respect the outcome of the referendum. I understand that. There is an honesty and a consistency to her approach, but that approach does not happen to be shared by the Labour party. We do accept the outcome of the referendum. Over the last year we have consistently fought to ensure that Parliament has a proper role in the process. Of course, we would have liked the outcome on that in the withdrawal Bill to be different. But by focusing on that and working with Members on all sides of this House and in the other place, we made real progress toward a meaningful vote, and we will look to return to it in other legislation.

We are not supporting calls for a second referendum or a people’s vote. Why is that? I know that some people are frustrated by our approach, but the reason is that we respect the outcome of the referendum. We have been entirely consistent about that. When we asked people to vote in the 2016 referendum, we said that their vote counted, and we meant it. The impact of now telling voters that we did not mean it, or that we did not like
the answer that they gave, would be profound. Members
do not need to take my word for it; they can take the
words of the leader of the Lib Dems, who—freed from
the trappings of coalition—said in 2016:

“The public have voted and I do think it’s seriously disrespectful
and politically utterly counterproductive to say ‘Sorry guys, you’ve
got it wrong, we’re going to try again’.”

Spot on. It is a shame that that kind of insight does not
survive becoming a Lib Dem MP.

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): There is no
such thing as a jobs-first Brexit. If the hon. Lady has
seen any economic analysis that tells her otherwise, will
she let us know about it?

Jenny Chapman: There are parties in this House—we
are hearing a lot from them this afternoon—that do not
accept the outcome of the referendum. The Labour
party is not one of them. We accept the outcome of the
referendum and all the challenges that it poses.

Sir Vince Cable: Does the hon. Lady not accept that
there is a difference between accepting the referendum
when it happened, and looking at the circumstances
now, two years on, when the situation is utterly changed—
not least because of the revelations, which were not
available at the time, about large-scale cheating and
criminal activity?

Jenny Chapman: If I believed for one minute that
another referendum would be a well-informed discussion
among the people of this country about customs, trade,
tariffs and the economy, I might take a different view.
Unfortunately, that is not what I expect to happen.
Labour is not calling for a second referendum because
we believe that doing so at this stage would make it
harder to get the right deal for Brexit.

Peter Heaton-Jones: The hon. Lady is being generous
with her time. Much as I am loth to take the focus a way
from the Liberal Democrats, there is still some confusion
about the Labour position. Only five days ago, the
shadow Brexit Secretary said:

“We’re not calling for it. We respect the result of the first
referendum. But we’re not ruling out a second referendum.”

Jenny Chapman: I said that, too. I do not know the
hon. Gentleman well, but I take him to be a man of
high intellect and cleverness. I do not think it is too
difficult a concept to grasp that we are not calling for
something, but we do not feel that we can, from a
position of opposition, rule things out and impose red
lines in the way the Government have done. This whole
process has been bedevilled by unnecessary red lines,
which have later had to be rubbed out and faded to pale
pink. We are not calling for a second referendum; I
really cannot be any clearer about it.

Another reason for that is that we want to focus on
the terms of the Brexit deal. Labour has engaged fully
with the negotiations and the Brexit process. We have
set out what a post-Brexit approach could be, and we
have sought to shape it. Calling for a second referendum
would make that much more difficult, and it would
mean we had nothing to say about the negotiations or
what our future outside the EU should look like. Again,
who was it who warned in 2016 that backing a second
referendum risked marginalising the UK in negotiations?

None other than Vince from Twickenham, who said
that he thought the Lib Dems should show

“more emphasis on what it is we want from these negotiations
rather than arguing about the tactics”.

Again—spot on. There are also practical problems with
how a second referendum would work. When would it
be held, what would the question be and what would
happen if there were another narrow result in either
direction?

Finally, we also need to consider the impact a second
referendum would have on an already divided country.
The first referendum was incredibly divisive. It pitted
family against family, and community against community.
I know that many of my colleagues and many people in
my constituency have no desire to repeat that. They fear
that doing so would further inflame and divide our
communities. That is not a trivial concern, and I urge
Members to reflect carefully on it. For all those reasons,
we will not be supporting the motion today.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Can I suggest
that we do up to 10 minutes, to try to give everybody
equal time?

3.7 pm

John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk)
(Con): Like each and every one of the Liberal Democrats,
I did not get the referendum result that I wanted in
2016. I campaigned and voted for the United Kingdom
to remain part of the European Union. In the early
hours of 24 June, I looked on in a state of disbelief as
the results came in, and it took weeks, if not months, for
the implications of the vote properly to sink in. In
Scotland, the uncertainty and disbelief were compounded
by the new calls from the SNP and the nationalists for a
second referendum to break up the United Kingdom.

Neither my personal view ahead of the referendum
nor my personal reaction to the vote really matters.
What matters is that the voters made their decision, and
our job as parliamentarians is to ensure that we respect
that decision and implement it in the best way possible.
I find it impossible to ignore the blatant hypocrisy and
incoherence of the Liberal Democrats’ position on this
matter—hypocrisy, because they want to re-run a once-
in-a-generation vote across the United Kingdom, but
claim to oppose a rerun of another once-in-a-generation
vote north of the border in Scotland. Their party leader,
Willie Rennie MSP, says,

“With the Scottish economy teetering on the edge of a
recession...the last thing our country needs is another divisive
and distracting independence debate.”

I agree with Willie Rennie.

Layla Moran: Will the hon. Gentleman explain how
the first referendum held after all the facts have been
presented to us would count as a rerun, given that there
would be new facts? In my constituency, for example,
BMW has now come out and said that businesses
would be harmed, and that would mean that my
constituents would lose their jobs. Why should they not
have the right to change their minds?”

Leaving the EU: Negotiations
10 JULY 2018
Leaving the EU: Negotiations
Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, whether we are talking about the European Union referendum or the independence referendum, we are not in the business of playing “best of three”?

John Lamont: My hon. Friend has made an important point. Best of three, best of five, best of seven—how often do we need to keep rerunning votes until Opposition Members get the result that they want, and are happy to accept the democratic wishes of the people of this great country?

The Liberal Democrats’ position is also hypocritical, because they claim to be democrats and claim to be standing up for a people’s choice in one breath, and in the next breath they want to ignore the people’s vote the first time around. The reality is that the electorate made their choice knowing there would be no second referendum. The Prime Minister at the time, David Cameron, repeatedly made that clear. Every voter received a leaflet from the Government stating that the vote was “a once in a generation decision”, and told voters that the UK Government “will implement what you decide.”

The Liberal Democrats’ position is also incoherent, because they think that the electorate made the wrong decision the first time around, but believe that a second referendum would produce a different result. What would a second Liberal Democrat referendum actually achieve? A greater leave vote and the possibility of a harder Brexit; a remain vote followed by justified calls from Brexiteers for another referendum to decide the matter once and for all; or roughly the same result, and an even more frustrated electorate.

Tom Brake: May I return the hon. Gentleman briefly to the issue of business uncertainty, about which he is concerned and which he says that a second referendum, or a final say on the deal, would cause? Does he not accept that one thing that is certain from a business perspective is that, according to the Government’s own impact assessments, whichever model we end up with when we leave the European Union, all the businesses about which he professes to worry will be worse off?

John Lamont: I accept that any change will create uncertainty, but I see the positive future beyond that initial period of uncertainty, and I see the opportunities that our country will face once we leave the European Union. When Opposition Members try to add to that uncertainty by proposing yet another referendum, another campaign, another period of not knowing what the outcome will be, that does nothing to help business and our economic prosperity.

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Is my hon. Friend not amazed that the stock market is doing so well, and that we have the lowest unemployment we have had for many years? Is that not a reflection of how well the economy is doing—costing in the fact that we are leaving the EU?

John Lamont: That is a good point. One of the great strengths of our businesses is their ability to adapt and respond to challenges. During our recent half-term break, I spent a week visiting businesses in my constituency. When I asked them what was the biggest challenge they
faced—whether they were small businesses employing a handful of people, or big businesses employing 800 or so—not one of them said “Brexit”. I asked them, “Why on earth did you not say ‘Brexit’, given that all we read in the press is about Brexit and the difficulties you will face?” They said, “We are resilient. We adapt to whatever the challenge may be. The reason for our present strength and success is our ability to adapt to those challenges.”

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) rose—

Christine Jardine rose—

John Lamont: I want to make a bit more progress, if I may. I will take more interventions later.

One thing is certain: another referendum—a Liberal Democrat referendum—on our membership of the EU would simply play into the hands of Nicola Sturgeon and the separatists who wish to destroy the United Kingdom by ripping Scotland out of the heart of it. I am no fan of referendums, and neither are many of the voters whom I speak to. Referendums cause huge uncertainty, put off businesses, and divide nations. Now that we have a sensible, pragmatic approach to Brexit agreed by the Government and a parliamentary vote, there is little to gain from another referendum and much to lose.

The motion refers to the lack of progress on Brexit. I want to say a little about one issue on which the UK Government have made significant progress, both in terms of their thinking and in terms of their negotiation with Brussels: the issue of fishing. I must admit that when the Government announced that we would remain part of the common fisheries policy during the transition period—a policy hated by fishermen and fishing communities throughout Scotland—I was disappointed, to say the least. But, since then, and since the publication of the fisheries White Paper last week, we have seen concrete action that will work for Scottish fishermen. Despite the delay, we will be leaving the CFP in December 2020, which means that by 1 January 2021, British waters will once again be just that: British. It will be up to us to decide who has access to them and we will be presented with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change the way in which we operate in them. We will be able to ensure that stocks are fished sustainably, we will be able to negotiate with other countries, and we will have full control over our natural resources.

I was delighted that the White Paper also made it clear that the issue of access to British waters for European boats would not be conflated with access to European markets for British fish. That is crucial, and as the Government continue their negotiations with the EU, they must ensure that they do not allow Brussels to control over our natural resources.

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I was delighted that the White Paper also made it clear that the issue of access to British waters for European boats would not be conflated with access to European markets for British fish. That is crucial, and as the Government continue their negotiations with the EU, they must ensure that they do not allow Brussels to abuse the right of access to British waters.

Jamie Stone: A constituent of mine, Mr William Calder, has a fish processing business in Scrabster. If what happens in the future leads to the addition of half a day to his two-day delivery journey to France, he will be in serious trouble. We need to avoid anything like that happening at a border, whether it is at Dover or Calais.

John Lamont: I agree that we need to ensure that our fishermen have the best possible deal, but what our fishermen want is to be out of the common fisheries policy and to have control of our waters. What the Liberal Democrats are proposing is to go back into the CFP, which is absolutely not what the Scottish fishermen want.

I am conscious of time so I am going to conclude. The most obvious reason why the Liberal Democrats’ call for a second EU referendum should be rejected is that the voters simply do not want it. Only one of the last 10 opinion polls on this has shown public support for a second referendum. The Liberal Democrat Members need to be asking themselves why, if a second EU referendum was so popular, only 12 of them are sitting on the Opposition Benches. When the Liberal Democrats stood on a manifesto promising another vote only a dozen Lib Dem MPs were returned. In my constituency, which had been represented by Liberal Democrats including David Steel, Archy Kirkwood and Michael Moore for over 50 years, the party came fourth in last year’s general election and lost its deposit.

Liberal Democrats would do well to stop patronising voters. They should abandon their insistence that the electorate, just because they disagree with Lib Dem party policy, cannot possibly be right, and drop their call for a second referendum.

3.20 pm

Stephen Gethins (North East Fife) (SNP): I thank the Liberal Democrats for introducing this debate, which is exceptionally timely, not least because the wheels have well and truly come off the Brexit bus. We have a Government who have fallen apart, the clock is ticking, and it is clear that, having triggered article 50 without having any clear plan, they have absolutely no idea what comes next. That should trouble us all.

Whether we like it or not—and some of us might not like it very much—this Government are responsible for the most complex, far-reaching and important negotiations since the war, and their decisions, or lack of decisions and lack of coherence, will have an impact on every one of us: on jobs, on the economy, on opportunities for young people in the future. I may not like that, but it is a fact that each and every one of us needs to consider.

We saw yesterday two resignations in 24 hours. I disagreed with Mr Davis, who is not in his place, wholeheartedly, but he always treated me and colleagues with courtesy and I wish him the very best for the future. And as the Prime Minister said yesterday of Mr Johnson, of course we respect his passion.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are not meant to use names.

Stephen Gethins: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. Brexiteers have had their whole careers to prepare, and then the former Ministers whom I have just mentioned had two years in the highest offices of state, with every resource of the UK Government at their disposal, to build on their years and years of so-called preparation, yet we are left in this complete mess. I do not blame the Minister present entirely for it, and indeed I do not blame the Prime Minister entirely, but those Brexiteers who got us into this mess and have done absolutely nothing to get us out of it again have shown gross irresponsibility and negligence. They bear huge responsibility for the situation in which we have been left. This is serious stuff.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We are not meant to use names.
I was very disappointed by the contribution of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), whom I respect enormously. There is no such thing as a “jobs-first Brexit.” Every single scenario that has been set out shows jobs being lost. Even the compromise we have put forward of staying in the single market and customs union is the least worst—not the best—option. I am sorry to say that if only the Labour party would step up to the mark, we would not be in the mess we are in today. Therefore, I say with great respect to Labour Members that Labour needs to step up to the plate a little more, because the UK as a whole finds itself in the most extraordinarily difficult situation. /Interruption./ I will happily give way to the shadow Minister if she has a point to make about a jobs-first Brexit. /Interruption./ No, I did not think so.

To throw some light on this matter, Rabobank has said that this situation could cost the UK economy £400 billion. The Fraser of Allander Institute says it could cost 80,000 jobs in Scotland alone and cost Scotland’s economy £12.7 billion, and the head of that respected economic think-tank said that it had only done the work for Scotland but, looking elsewhere, it would be even worse for other parts of the UK. It is startling that the Scottish Government did economic analysis and published it and those of us who have seen it know that although the Scottish and UK Governments might not agree on much in this process, their economic analysis agrees entirely on the devastation that will be wrought by this Government if they see through their plans. This must be one of the first times in history when a Government are actively, and proactively, pursuing a policy that they know will cost tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of jobs.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend will recall that the UK Government’s modelling showed a hit to GDP in the long term of minus 1.6% if we stayed in the European economic area. Does he agree that under the Chequers agreement, which takes services out of the mix, that hit will be considerably greater, particularly in terms of the jobs Labour is promising us from Brexit?

Stephen Gethins: My hon. and learned Friend makes an excellent point, and she is well aware from the work she has done representing financial services in her constituency of the difficulties and job losses from the Government’s plans.

I find it extraordinary that we have a Government who are proactively pursuing a policy that they know will cost jobs, and they know will hit our GDP and our public services, because if GDP is hit there will not be the tax-take to provide the support for public services in the future. That will be devastating. I know that the Minister tries his best and is a very honourable man, but it must be extremely hard for Ministers to be pursuing this policy, and I urge them to think again about the damage they are doing to the economy and elsewhere.

We have a need for EU nationals. They should have been given a huge amount of certainty. EU nationals contribute so much to our public services and our companies, and contribute to this place and beyond—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker) indicated assent.

Stephen Gethins: I am glad that the Minister is nodding. To charge EU nationals £65 a pop just to remain at home is outrageous and shameful, and it should shame the rest of us.

We should also think about the fact that our universities rely on initiatives such as Horizon 2020 and that our farmers rely on seasonal workers. I benefited from the Erasmus programme, but young people might not do so in the future. Winnie Ewing, a former SNP MEP, was key to the success of bringing in Erasmus, working with members of other parties, including in other parts of Europe. I wanted to mention that so I can wish Winnie Ewing a happy 89th birthday—she was also a Member of this place.

One of the saddest things is that those of us who are in this place now will leave fewer opportunities for young people than we enjoyed. They will have fewer opportunities than we had when we started off in politics. We should all have at least an aspiration to leave more, but that is not the state that we are in at the moment. The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who is not in her place at the moment, talked about trust in the Westminster Government. The recent social attitudes survey showed that, in Scotland, levels of trust in the Westminster Government are down at 20%. That means that only 20% of people in Scotland think that Westminster is working in their best interests, and is it any wonder that that trust is at such a low ebb? The figure for Holyrood sits at 61%, which is much higher than the figure for this Government.

For the future, there is a need to reach out to other parties and to the devolved Administrations. The Scottish Government set out a plan just after the referendum in a way that the UK Government have yet to do—we have been waiting years for any plans from the UK Government—to stay in the customs union and the single market. I pay tribute to the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru and the Green party for joining us in that aspiration and that work. In fairness, some Labour Back Benchers have also had the aspiration to work towards that goal.

The UK is hopelessly divided at the moment. Scotland did not vote to leave the European Union. The Scottish Parliament has acknowledged, and this place acknowledged only last week, that according to the claim of right, Scotland should remain sovereign and make its own decisions in the future. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that claim of right when he winds up the debate. We are in this mess because of a Conservative civil war, but bringing an end to it cannot be done merely by seeking solutions within the Conservative party. It can be done only by reaching out before it is too late.

3.31 pm

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con):

“I will forgive no one who does not respect the sovereign voice of the British people once it has spoken. Whether it is a majority of 1% or 20%, when the British people have spoken you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you do not.”
Those are not my words but the words of the noble Lord Ashdown on the evening of the referendum. This motion calls for a second referendum, but I believe that a second referendum would be seriously disrespectful. It would be utterly counterproductive, and I will not be voting for it this evening.

3.31 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): We are having a slight let-off from the hot weather, but it strikes me that we have become a bit of a cliché with our similarities to a Mediterranean country over the past few weeks. We have had incredible weather, we are good at football and we have chaotic politics. In the chaos of the past 48 hours, many things have been revealed, not least the fact that the now former Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union spent a grand total of four hours this year negotiating the deal with Michel Barnier. I can inform the House that I have spent more time filling in my World Cup chart than the former Secretary of State spent doing his job.

I want to focus on our countryside and on the production of food. Cumbria and the Lake District won their own world title a year ago this week when the area became a world heritage site. We are very proud of that, and it was clear in the document that the world heritage site status that we were afforded by UNESCO was just as much down to the work of the farmers who maintain the landscape as it was down to the physical nature and the geology itself. It is massively important to recognise that it is not just the landscape that makes our countryside so beautiful, not only in the Lake District but in the dales and all the other beautiful parts of the United Kingdom; it is largely down to the work of our farmers.

The production of food is also of massive significance. I am sure all Members will share my concern that we have seen a massive rise in the amount of food that we import over the past 20 years. In 1990, we imported about 35% of the food that we consume. The figure is now about 45%. As the process of leaving the European Union trundles on, one thing that will undoubtedly have an impact on this country’s ability to feed itself will be the agriculture Bill that we are expecting to see, perhaps before the summer or perhaps shortly after.

It will also massively depend on what kind of deal we get. What situation will we face when it comes to tariffs or no tariffs on our imports and exports? That is why it is right, and respectful of the British people, to decide to engage fully in what kind of deal we get and to object if the Government present us with a shabby deal or if others in the Government wish to have a deal that is even shabbier than the one that the Government are presenting.

I am one of the 6% of Members of Parliament who bothered to go and look at the Brexit impact assessment documents in Whitehall when they were sort of semi-released earlier this year. Obviously I would not leak a single word of what I read—oh go on, since you’ve twisted my arm. One of the things that most struck me was the war-gaming that the Government had done for some rather terrifying prospects. For example, it is worth bearing in mind that, whether we like it or not, membership of the European Union has removed from this place and this country the imperative to debate whether it was right to subsidise food over the past 40 years, but by golly we have, and we will notice if we stop subsidising food.

Over the past 40 years, the average spend of a lower-middle-income household on food has gone down from 20% of the weekly wage packet to 10%. At the same time, housing costs have doubled. If we remove direct payments for farmers and/or if there are tariffs on imports into this country, the reality is that we will see a significant rise in the price of food on the shelves. The wealthiest people in this country spend 10% of their income on food, but the poorest spend 25%. I do not care how anyone voted two years ago or what they think about the Chequers deal, because they should care about impending food poverty on every street in this country. That is likely to be the most worrying aspect of what we get if we have a bad deal.

The Government are mindful of the problem, which is why they war-gamed what it would look like if the EU charged tariffs on UK exports into the single market, but the Government chose not to retaliate with import tariffs on EU goods. I can understand that the Government would do that to protect the interests of the poorest consumers in this country, but UK farming would be thrown under a bus. It would be decimated within a decade. That is why such issues matter. That is why the content of the deal matters. It is not anti-patriotic, anti-democratic or anything of the sort to question the nature of the deal, but based on esoterica about sovereignty or anything else, but based on the hard, visceral reality of whether people in this country can afford to feed their children.

Gareth Snell: The hon. Gentleman is correct about food poverty, but it is wrong to suggest that it is a construct of Brexit. Will he tell us what he did in government for five years to deal with food poverty? People in my constituency have been hungry for a long time, and that is not due to Brexit.

Tim Farron: I will tell the hon. Gentleman what we did. Among other things, we forced the Tories to implement benefit rises of 5%, and we ensured that we raised the income tax threshold to lift more than a million people out of poverty. It is much easier to be on the Opposition Benches than the Government Benches, but I am rightly proud of the five years that the Liberal Democrats spent in government, preventing the Tories from doing their worst and ensuring that we did the best for our country. We know that the Government have war-gamed throwing farming under a bus, but they are also preparing to levy shocking increases in food prices on both the poorest and middle-income families.

The Chequers deal is interesting. It is worth saying that I think the Prime Minister is a decent person. We go back quite a long way, and I take her to be a decent person who is seeking a consensus where perhaps none is to be found, so I will give her the benefit of the doubt. Of course, the reality is that the Chequers deal is unimplementable, undeliverable and unacceptable to the European Union. It would mean effectively being in a single market for goods while not being in the single market, effectively being a member of the customs union while not being in the customs union, and effectively having freedom of movement while not having freedom of movement, and the European Union will say no to that.
My assumption over the weekend was that the most hard-line separatists within the Conservative party were accepting the Chequers deal, no matter how soft it looked, because they knew that the Prime Minister would present it to Brussels, Brussels would say, “Get knotted,” and it would then be Brussels’ fault that we did not get a decent deal.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): The motion calls for a Government of national unity. How many Cabinet jobs will the Liberal Democrats look for in this new coalition? This time round, how many red lines will they agree with the Tory Government?

Tim Farron: If the hon. Gentleman is going to read out questions from the Whips Office, he should at least read them out properly. We will come to what it might look like in a moment or two, but there are bigger things on the plate.

I am quite sure the Government’s assumption is that Friday’s Chequers deal will be unacceptable to Brussels, and they therefore proposed it because it makes it look like they have been listening to businesses, farmers and people of moderate intent—compromisers from both sides of the divide. The Government presented it, and the most hard-line separatists went along with it, because they thought, “Well, it’ll never be accepted. It will then be Brussels’ fault and not ours.” That seems a dishonourable approach, but it could be argued that it is a politically savvy one.

It was all going very well until vanity struck. In the early hours of Monday morning, or late on Sunday night, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) had an attack of vanity and, as we found out in the hours that followed, vanity is contagious.

That is the problem we have.

The motion seriously offers the idea of having a Government of national unity because the Prime Minister is beholden to people who are not putting the country first. They are not even putting their party first; they are completely and utterly obsessed with their own career and their own vanity. There is nothing honourable about that situation. Whether or not people like the idea of our leaving the European Union, and whatever variety of leaving the European Union they favour, it is not right that this country should be beholden to such pressure in this marginal situation.

Last night, because there was no World cup on the television, I decided to seek entertainment by heading over to the 1922 committee. I hung around outside with some friends from the press and, at that historic moment, it was interesting to hear the comments made by the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), the Conservative party chairman, who said, “Chequers stays. Chequers is the right path. We’re going to stick to it.” On the other hand, the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) came out and said, “Chequers is effectively a betrayal and we cannot vote for it.”

The problem our country has is that, with no parliamentary majority, the Prime Minister has to balance those two extremes. All of us in this House, no matter which party we support and no matter our record on the referendum vote two years ago, should care about the future of our country. Is it right that our children’s future and their children’s future—the next half century and the next century—should be dictated by a Prime Minister who is having to balance the interests of the venal and the vain? That is why we should work together to make sure we deliver a deal that works for everybody and that allows the people to have the final say.

3.43 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): I have the great honour of representing St Austell and Newquay in Cornwall, which was a new constituency in 2010. My home is in St Austell, so I previously lived in the Truro and St Austell constituency. I am the first Conservative Member of Parliament for that part of the country for 41 years. In fact, I was seven years old the last time we had a Conservative Member of Parliament. It was the constituency of the late, great David Penhaligon, and others since who may not have been quite so great.

I know what it is like to live under the representation of the Liberal Democrats, and one thing that has always puzzled me is why people in Cornwall, which has always been an incredibly Euro-sceptic area, kept voting for the Liberal Democrats for all those years. One reason is that in Cornwall the Liberal Democrats were very shy about their European enthusiasm. They did not tend to talk about it very much, and they tried to shy away from it.

When I started to speak to people on the doorstep, it came as a surprise to them when I advised that if they wanted to get out of Europe, the last thing they should do is vote for the Liberal Democrats. That is why I have respect for the Liberal Democrats’ position now, because from my point of view in Cornwall, at least they are at last being honest about it. They are being honest in saying they want to exit from Brexit and deny the result that the British people reached in the referendum. They think the British people got it wrong, having been ill-informed, having misunderstood or having been too thick to understand what it meant, so we should try to overturn the decision and try again.

I have a degree of respect for the Liberal Democrats’ honesty at the moment, but I have to say that the message I get from people time and time again is that the British people simply want us to get on with this. I speak to Conservative party members, as well as members of other parties, and I hear that the British people are tired of the debate on the process. They are tired of the Westminster bubble, where we endlessly debate and try to rerun the arguments from 2016. They simply think, “The British people made a decision. Let’s get on and deliver it. Let’s leave the EU and let’s deliver Brexit the best we possibly can.” I believe that is the attitude and view of the vast majority of the British people.

Sir Edward Davey: I met people in my constituency during the 2017 election who had that view—people who had voted to remain but said that now we should get on with it. However, I had local elections in my constituency in May, so I was knocking on a lot of doors, and I detect that opinion is shifting on the ground and in the polls. People are seeing the disarray of this botched Brexit, which is why they are changing their mind. May I ask the hon. Gentleman: has he ever changed his mind?

Steve Double: I have changed my mind, but I suspect that now is not the time to go into that. I have changed my mind on a number of things over the years, but I do
not detect what the right hon. Gentleman says he is finding. I do not find it in my constituency from the people I speak to on the doorstep and meet around the place, or from the people who come to my surgeries. The clear message I get is, “We made a decision. Let’s get on with it.” A lot of people just cannot understand why we have not left already. They are frustrated because—

[Interruption.] I would say it is because of Members on both sides of the House who have sought to delay the process—perhaps we will come on to discuss that.

I will not support the motion, and I wish to set out three reasons why it is a bad idea. First, I believe it would be bad for our democracy. We gave the decision to the British people. We are absolutely clear in the lead-up to the referendum two years ago that this decision was in the hands of the British people and that they would be making the decision. If we tried to rerun the referendum, in whatever form we want to put it, be it a second referendum or a referendum on the final deal, I do not think the British people would buy it. They would just see it as trying to change the decision. It would simply be saying to them, “Your view and your vote did not count.” As I said when I intervened earlier, I believe that one reason why many people voted leave was to give a clear message to the establishment saying, “We are fed up of being ignored. We want our voice heard. We want our opinion to count.”

It is a miracle that people voted leave, because the overwhelming movement of the establishment—of the Government, big business and so much of our society—was telling them “This is the wrong decision. This is a stupid decision to make. This is a detrimental decision to make.” The majority of people chose to ignore that and vote leave, and we should respect that.

Wera Hobhouse: This is a debate about democracy. Like the hon. Gentleman, I am confident that people make good decisions in the end. The decision made in June 2016 was a single decision that warranted another decision. He has just accepted that the people make interesting decisions, so why will he not allow them to make another decision on this issue, which is far more far-reaching now that we are going to face a deal on the decision?

Steve Double: The answer is simple: if that decision goes the other way, do we have a third and a fourth? Do we just keep going until we get the decision that some of us want? No. We made it clear to the British people. As has already been said, the former Prime Minister said that it was a once-in-a-lifetime decision and that there would be no opportunity for people to change their mind and go back. That was it, and we need to respect that.

Gareth Snell: The hon. Gentleman talked about people turning out to vote leave. Did he experience in his constituency what happened in my constituency, where not only did people turn out to vote leave, but the highest number of people in any election in the past 20 years turned out to vote? We simply cannot scoff at that.

Steve Double: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the turnout was very high. I observed that the more “Project Fear” turned up the heat and told people that they were wrong to think of voting to leave, the more people were driven to vote leave. It was very much a reaction against being told by the establishment, “We know best. You should do what we tell you.”

My second point is that to have a second referendum now would undermine our negotiating position. The point has been made many times, but it needs to be made again: if the EU knows that whatever deal is agreed will be put to a vote of the British people, it will make sure that it is the worst possible deal that it can provide, in the hope that we will reject it, reverse the decision to leave and remain in the EU. For that reason, we cannot allow a second referendum to take place.

My third point is that any second referendum would cause further delay and uncertainty. People want us to get on with it. Business wants certainty: it wants to know what the end state is going to be. Any second referendum would delay that and create even more uncertainty, because even when we had agreed a deal with the EU, we would not know whether the British people were going to support it. British business would not know whether it was going to be the final outcome. If it was rejected, that would create further delay and uncertainty. Right now, more than anything, business wants to know what the state of play is going to be when we leave. Business wants certainty and to know what the circumstances are going to be. Any second referendum would cause further delay and create even more uncertainty.

Layla Moran rose—

Steve Double: I am going to wind up now.

In the best interests of our country, we simply need to get on with it and deliver the best Brexit that we possibly can. We need to deliver what the British people gave us the instruction to do. They gave us that instruction and we need to respect it and deliver on it.

3.52 pm

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) because, despite being on opposite sides of politics, we share some commonality in respect of this issue, which is that we are both democrats, but thankfully not Liberal Democrats. We both understand that our constituencies voted leave for a number of reasons, none of which were necessarily those categorised by the overtures of the right-wing press, who make it out to be all about immigration and rather nasty things. People were shouting out against the establishment for considering them not worthy of having their say.

The huge turnout in Stoke-on-Trent Central—before I was its Member of Parliament, I hasten to add—demonstrated an engagement in a political process that has not been replicated since. There have been two opportunities to vote in an election in Stoke-on-Trent Central since the referendum: a by-election, in which I was elected to this place, and a subsequent general election. Fewer people voted in those subsequent elections than voted in the referendum, which shows that the issues on which they voted were diverse and complicated.

Let me pick up on the motion. The Liberal Democrats have, as always, quite adeptly tried to position themselves as one thing—in this case, the moral conscience of the remain-voting populace of this country—but at the
same time tabled a motion that does not really address the issues. As the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay said, the motion is on a process issue; it is not on a policy issue or a substantive issue. It is about a unity Government.

We can make jokes about the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) having a ministerial car he can be driven around in, but the motion is about the Liberal Democrats inveigling their way back into government so that they can influence something on which the electorate have consistently rejected them. If they are so confident that their position can command the support of the electorate, they can all trigger by-elections in each of their seats and run purely on having a second referendum. If their confidence is correct, they will all be returned to this place with increased majorities and it will all be fine and dandy. I suspect, though, that they do not have the courage of their convictions to do that, because they know that what they are actually doing is attempting to subvert democratic processes merely for electoral gain further on down the road. That is that they are doing with this motion, so I shall not support it.

The Liberal Democrats have also failed to address the following: what is the question they actually want to put to the public? I find it quite odd that, on the one side, we have the Liberal Democrats and, on the other, members of the European Reform Group, who are all waiting in the wings, rubbing their hands in absolute glee at a no-deal scenario, because actually that is what they want. The Liberal Democrats, along with members of the European Reform Group on the Conservative Benches, and, sadly, a number of my colleagues, who normally would be here in vocal force, but who have not found their tongues today, are all rubbing their hands in glee at a no-deal scenario because they see a no-deal scenario as a path to something else. They are very different, diverging paths, but the best thing that they can hope for to facilitate their own political interests is a no deal.

The Liberal Democrats and some of my colleagues believe that a no-deal scenario would instantly lead to our staying in the European Union forever and a day—job done, democracy thwarted, never mind what the people thought, that is what it is, big shrugs, move on. Members of the European Reform Group, who again would normally be here in the Chamber—I presume that they have something more important on today; some letters need signing, no doubt—would normally see a no deal and think, “Great, we have thrown off the shackles of an imperialist Europe that tried to thwart Britannia in all of her mighty ways.” I find it absolutely mind-boggling that, in the 21st century in this place, we have, on the one side, the Liberal Democrats and, on the other, the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) and his motley gang all campaigning essentially for the same thing and they will not be honest about why they want that.

That is why I do agree in part with what is in the motion regarding a unity Government, although not because I seek to be part of it or because I think that it will work. What the Prime Minister should have done, almost 18 months ago now, when she did not have the majority of her own party before the general election, and when she did not have a majority for her party after the election, is look across this Chamber and its 650 Members, minus the abstentionists, and say, “How can I bring together a majority in this House for a Brexit deal that works—a Brexit deal that means that I can come back from the European Union with a deal that I know will command parliamentary majority support and that delivers on the customs arrangements that we all pretty much agree we need?” Actually, what we are arguing over is what we call it, not what it does. She should have said, “How can I bring together a majority in this House for a Brexit deal that allows us to have access to the single market and determines how much we trade off paying for that access against how much freedom of movement we are willing to accept and also delivers on the protections for workers’ rights, consumer rights and environmental rights?” We know those are important because we have all said that they are important but, again, we have not quite got there. Instead of doing that, the Prime Minister took a very narrow view and tried to satiate two warring parts of one political party, to the detriment of her negotiations.

I and a number of colleagues, along with, I suspect, many Labour Front-Bench Members—I cannot speak for them as I am a humble Back Bencher—would happily have a conversation about how we can make Brexit work. As the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay said, we have spent far too long talking about process, rather than talking about policy. We have spent too long talking about dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s and not about the societal changes that we need that will help our country to come together and accept a Brexit deal that works. This is where the second referendum, a people’s vote, or whatever you wish to call it and dress it up as, is a folly and a nonsense. Nothing has altered in my constituency in the past 18 months that would change the way my constituents would vote if they had the deal put to them for a vote. In their minds, they would simply see this as a re-run of the referendum—are we in, or are we out?

Bob Stewart: I recall vividly that, when we were debating the referendum in my constituency and looking at documents produced by the Government, it was made absolutely clear that, if we voted to leave the European Union, that implied explicitly that we would be out of the single market and the customs union. It was plainly put down.

Gareth Snell: I am sure that it was. Subsequent elections meant that there is no majority necessarily in the House for that matter. If we are democrats, we are also pragmatists. It is better that we have a pragmatic deal that commands the majority of this House and that is workable so that we can end the uncertainty that exists in communities and in business, rather than necessarily stick to one or two dogmatic points. I have known the hon. Gentleman for a year, and he is a wonderful speaker at a number of events that I attend, but where we are and where we have come from are very different. However, again, that does not mean that we should suddenly be having a second referendum as advocated by the Liberal Democrats. I say again: I do not know what has changed in my constituency that would make my constituents think that, somehow, a vote on the deal would not be an in or out matter.

Tom Brake: I wonder whether one thing that has changed in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency is that his electors, who thought that there was going to be an
extra £350 million a week for the NHS, now realise that that is not going to be the case.

Gareth Snell: Perhaps if I were to ask the right hon. Gentleman for his diary, it would show a weekly trip to Stoke-on-Trent, so he could tell me what my electors are thinking—but I am guessing it does not. I need no lessons on what my electors think, because I speak to them week in, week out. Most of them simply want to get on with the process. My constituents voted 70:30 to leave, for a whole array of reasons. Some will have been driven by the issue of efficiencies in the NHS. I would point to the fact that the reason why the NHS is on its knees is that the Liberal Democrats enabled five years of the Conservative Government who put through the Health and Social Care Act 2012, not just chronic underfunding by the Conservative Government.

What my constituents do not say is, “Oh, actually, I’ve thought about it, and I no longer think leaving is a good idea.” In the entire time I have been Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent Central, I have had one email from one constituent telling me that they would vote differently—one. I do not see the great swathes of changing public opinion that has been referred to here; nor do I see any appetite for a second vote. All that would do is lead to greater division in this country; it would put off talking about the policy and the radical platform for change that we need to make communities better; it would allow the European Union to sit back and watch as we squabbled among ourselves, failing to get a deal that worked. If there is a Division on this motion this afternoon, I shall not be supporting it.

4.1 pm

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I find myself in an odd position. I was elected last year. I overcame a Tory majority of more than 9,500 votes, and yet in the debate since my election people seem to have completely forgotten that that election ever happened. We speak frequently about the will of the people in the referendum. That is true, but there was then a further asking of the people what they wanted. The Tory version of Brexit—the version that the Tories have been trying to deliver, badly, up until this last weekend, and look at how that has unravelled—was rejected.

Oxford West and Abingdon voted 62% to remain, and although 62% does not perhaps sound a lot, it is worth saying that the remainers in my constituency are so strongly remain that they put EU flags proudly on their doors, and the leavers are more, “Oh, on balance I want to leave”. As new facts have come to light, they are changing their minds in their swathes. There are plenty of emails in my inbox and, I am sure, in many inboxes.

Just this morning, I met a young activist who used to be a Tory party member and voted to leave in 2016. When he realised that he was not going to get the Norway/Switzerland-style Brexit that had been spoken about by many front-and-centre Brexiteers, he decided to leave the Tories and to join the Lib Dems. I did not know that, but he has done so because our position is absolutely clear.

In 2017, the electorate did make a choice. In the referendum, the will of the people was the will of the 52%—48% have been completely ignored, however. There was a whole other way this could have gone. Rather than the Prime Minister standing up and saying, “We are going to go for the hardest possible Brexit; we are going to leave the customs union; we are going to leave the single market; we are not going to involve Parliament; we are not going to release impact assessments”, there is another version of the past. Every step along the way, as a new Member of Parliament, I have felt that this Government do not really care about our opinions; all they want to do is to hold themselves together. The other version would have been for a Prime Minister to stand up, reach out across the House and say, “I am going to go the middle way and deliver that Norway/Switzerland soft Brexit.” That was the compromise position. That is not what has happened and that is why we are in the position we are in now.

Bob Stewart: I respectfully point out to the hon. Lady that the Conservatives got 43% of the vote at the last general election. That is a huge number—a very large percentage of the people, and larger than normal. The Conservative party got endorsement from the people beyond the referendum for its mandate to carry out Brexit.

Layla Moran: It was 43% but it was not enough to deliver sufficient numbers of Members of Parliament. In my constituency, I was elected on an extremely clear mandate to stop a hard Brexit. The Green party stood down, and swathes of Labour voters came over to me. In fact, many remainider Conservatives—this is what my in-box is stuffed with—are saying that they will never vote Tory again because of what this Government are doing to all sorts of sectors, business being one of them.

Steve Double: I am listening to the hon. Lady with great interest. Is she aware that many findings after the last general election showed that for the majority of British people, Brexit was not a big issue that drove their vote? They were far more concerned about domestic policy issues. A lot of people thought that Brexit was done with in the last election, and there is clear evidence that actually it did not drive many people’s votes last year—they were far more concerned about other matters.

Layla Moran: Indeed. That is why it is so striking that people do not now want to ask them what they think of this new settlement. The point of this debate is to ask the people and to trust the people. The people of Oxford West and Abingdon put me here to make the case on how Brexit is going to affect them and their families.

Gareth Snell: I personally feel that there is no deal better than the deal we already have. That is what we had in our manifesto and that is our clear mandate. As I
said, I achieved an enormous swing, so I can only assume that my constituents understood that. The Conservatives were proposing a possible World Trade Organisation-style Brexit—much harder, I dare say, than what Labour is suggesting now. However, I would still categorise Labour’s position as also being for a hard Brexit, because at the time, soft Brexit was defined as staying in the single market and the customs union, and somehow the rhetoric has changed over time.

It would be interesting now to turn to Ross from Kidlington. I care about what people—my constituents—think rather than just what this House thinks. Ross said: “We are beside ourselves with how this government is behaving: squabbling in its ranks, only interested in keeping their own nests feathered, telling outright lies to those who voted for Brexit... Why are MPs in the in the Labour party not following their own consciences and voting for what they really believe?”

I find fascinating the number of conversations we have outside this Chamber where MPs from across the House recognise how damaging Brexit is going to be. I do not understand how they can look their constituents in the eye knowing that their jobs may well go and knowing the effect on the economy. In Oxford West and Abingdon, we have one of the most buoyant economies in the country, but if we leave the single market, even we will face a medium-term depression. I cannot stand by and watch that happen.

I loved what Jonathan from Abingdon had to say: “How, now two years post referendum, do the government have no plan to implement and it scares me more than anything else. Even though every expert opinion is that it will damage the country, including the governments own experts, they are still ploughing ahead with it seems the full support of the Labour party... Please continue to fight this crazy act of self-harm the government is proposing with everything you can.”

I intend to do that. These are my constituents and I am standing up for them today.

The point about a further referendum is that new facts have come to light. We are not just talking about the Northern Irish border, although that is one of the most alarming aspects. Ryan, a Gibraltarian student at Keble College, said that Brexit “poses an existential threat to my homeland... The fate of my country is out of the hands of Gibraltarians, and is being decided behind closed doors. I fear the Government may negotiate something of ours away without our consent.”

Then there are the universities—Oxford and Oxford Brookes—and Erasmus, Horizon 2020 and the science sectors. The first question I ever asked in this House was on Euratom. At the time, someone sidled up and said, “What’s that?” We did not entirely appreciate the full consequences of Brexit, and now we do. I am pleased to say that the House has taken that on very positively, but new facts have come to light, and business is what I am most concerned about.

It is not just about BMW, which is in Oxford. Fabulous Flowers wrote to me and said:

“We need to ensure a stable workforce with labour from other EU member states and all sectors of horticulture and flower growing, harvesting etc in the UK. We have to question the UK’s capability in terms of infrastructure and resources at points of entry to handle the level of import controls. A longer wait at the border could bring a disadvantage to flower imports in future as it could impact on quality or vase life. Flowers could end up more expensive.” It is not just about big business; it is also about the little guys, and they matter too.

As a science teacher—that is what I did before I came to this place—I believe in evidence, and it is not just me. I know that because some of the kids I taught are now adults, and they believe in evidence too. It is only fair that if new evidence comes to light, people should be allowed to change their mind. If it is a deal that they did not vote for and is not what they expected, what could be any more democratic than going back to the people and making sure it was what they wanted in the first place?

4.11 pm

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran).

I have listened with incredulity today to the claims from those on the Conservative Benches that they are delivering on Brexit. Every time I think this Brexit chaos cannot get any worse, I discover I am wrong—it can, and it does. The past few days have simply added chaos to uncertainty, built on complete mismanagement. Yesterday was perhaps the most unedifying spectacle yet. For me, it was a particularly surreal experience, and at the same time absolutely appropriate, because I was enjoying my daughter’s graduation ceremony at the University of Edinburgh when my phone buzzed with a message saying that the Foreign Secretary had resigned. That was followed by a flurry of other texts and newsflashes, which I mostly ignored.

While the Cabinet’s agreed stance on Brexit and the Cabinet itself were crumbling and what is left of our future relationship with Europe was being thrown under yet another Brexit bus, I was witnessing a particularly European experience. At the same time as I was getting all these texts, the founding father of the Erasmus scholarship programme stood up to accept his honorary doctorate and address the assembled graduates of Edinburgh University. He talked about the idea, inspiration and vision that has seen millions of EU students from this country and the others benefiting either directly or indirectly from meeting and sharing their experiences with Erasmus scholars from elsewhere. He also told us proudly about the 1 million Erasmus babies that there now are in Europe.

For Edinburgh University, like many other universities up and down the country, that scheme has been crucial. Edinburgh attracts the biggest share of Erasmus students of any Scottish university. Erasmus has also encouraged talented young people from across Europe to come and live and work in the UK. Two constituents visited me last week who are Spanish and have been here for a number of years, paying income tax at 40% and national insurance. They are now being asked to pay the fee to stay here that the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) mentioned, but these are people who came here to contribute, encouraged by European co-operation.

When the founder of the Erasmus scholarship programme sat down, I looked around the hall and I saw in front of me a wonderfully diverse group of students from all ethnic and social backgrounds. I glanced
at the list of those who were about to graduate, and it revealed names from across the continent. Here was Erasmus in operation and European co-operation in operation, and here was our future—the students’ and our country’s future. Meanwhile, the Government were indulging in self-inflicted chaos and mismanagement, and any semblance of a strategy for a future with Europe was crumbling.

Make no mistake: the students knew about this too, because their phones were buzzing with texts; I saw them glancing down at them every so often. The principal of the Edinburgh University then stood up and assured his students and the parents that the university would never turn its back on Europe, regardless of “the many obstacles that politicians might place in their way”. This is one politician who listened yesterday and who is determined to fight to remove such obstacles from the futures of those young people and other young people in this country who see their horizons narrowed and their opportunities limited by what is happening in this place on an almost daily basis. I heard what the students had to say and their positive reaction, because that statement by the principal of Edinburgh University received the loudest reaction of the day. I and my colleagues will not give up on defending that future.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald (Glasgow South) (SNP): In her speech about Erasmus, will the hon. Lady note that one of the people who helped to found it was Winnie Ewing, and today is her 89th birthday?

Christine Jardine: As the hon. Gentleman says—and his colleague the hon. Member for North East Fife mentioned it earlier—today is indeed Winnie Ewing’s 89th birthday. I have met the hon. Lady on more than one occasion, it earlier—today is indeed Winnie Ewing’s 89th birthday. I have met the hon. Lady on more than one occasion, and I think she would be extremely upset to see what is happening to the programme that has done so much for students in this country and elsewhere.

I am in the Chamber today to demand that we listen to those young people, their parents, the academicians and others in this country. We should listen to their demand, because their phones were buzzing with texts; I saw them glancing down at them every so often. The principal of the Edinburgh University then stood up and assured his students and the parents that the university would never turn its back on Europe, regardless of “the many obstacles that politicians might place in their way”. This is one politician who listened yesterday and who is determined to fight to remove such obstacles from the futures of those young people and other young people in this country who see their horizons narrowed and their opportunities limited by what is happening in this place on an almost daily basis. I heard what the students had to say and their positive reaction, because that statement by the principal of Edinburgh University received the loudest reaction of the day. I and my colleagues will not give up on defending that future.

4.18 pm

Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Sometimes in politics, parties and individual politicians must ensure that they are standing up for the right thing, given the evidence before them. One of the reasons why I am proud to be a Liberal Democrat is that we have done that on a number of issues of significant importance in the life of the country in recent years. Let me give House three examples.

The first example is the Iraq war. When the Labour party was pushing for the Iraq war, it had the support of the Conservative party, bar the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), and of the papers and the people, and it prosecuted that war. The Liberal Democrats were the sole voice, against public opinion, in warning that it courted disaster—for this country and for the middle east. We were right, and we were proven right.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) was warning against the financial crash—the banking crash—in 2007-08 three or four years before it happened. As a former very distinguished economist, he could see the signs, and as the Treasury spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, he warned that it was coming. People did not like his saying that—I remember Labour Treasury Ministers and Conservative spokespeople saying, “Oh, the voice of doom”—but my right hon. Friend was right. I wish more people had listened to him, as a lot of people’s lives and businesses would not have been wasted by an appalling economic recession.

So it is with Brexit. The evidence is clear that it is going to be a disaster for our country. Those of us who have the values of internationalists and believe that working with other countries is in our interests are not going to be silenced on this issue of huge importance. We are going to make the case. Just as on Iraq and the banking crisis, people’s views changed. I think that people’s views on Brexit and on a people’s vote are changing. I urge Members across the House to recognise that fact and get behind something that people will be joining.

Lloyd Russell-Moyle (Brighton, Kemptown)(Lab/Co-op): In 2015, the right hon. Gentleman’s party manifesto said it wanted a referendum on whether we should stay in or get out of Europe. Was that a mistake or was it just that you were so out of touch with the people that you thought you would win that referendum? I can tell you that our party did not think that.

Sir Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman, of course, is wrong. The manifesto was in 2005, when—[Interruption.]

Lloyd Russell-Moyle: I have the 2015 manifesto here!

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. The hon. Gentleman really must not use the word “you”, and let us not carry on with this sort of exchange.

Sir Edward Davey: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I know what was in the Liberal Democrat manifesto. In 2005, like all parties, we argued for a referendum on the European constitution. In 2015, we said that if there was a big change affecting sovereignty and powers, we would have a referendum. What happened afterwards was completely different, and the hon. Gentleman ought to know that.

I was saying that I detect that the demand for a people’s vote—a final say on the deal—is growing louder and louder. There are many reasons why I think that; it is not just evidence from the polls and from people talking to me around the country. I think it is a reaction to the chaos of this Conservative Government. If I were a Conservative MP, I would be embarrassed by the Government; I do not think we have been so badly governed since the second world war—probably before.
The Government simply cannot make up their mind about how to deal with the biggest issue of the day. They are totally split. The chaos of the past 48 hours beggars belief. It is pretty clear that the Chequers statement will not stand the test of time. The European Research Group, the hard-line Brexiteers, and some Tory remainers reject it and Brussels is saying that it is unacceptable. It is pretty clear that, after two years of effort, this chaotic Government cannot manage it. That is why we tabled this motion.

As one of my colleagues said earlier, people are sick and tired of Conservative Ministers, and indeed MPs, putting their personal or party interests above the nation’s. As my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) said, when we talk to some colleagues outside the Chamber, they admit that Brexit is a disaster.

Gareth Snell: Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify a point I asked about in my speech? What question would the Liberal Democrats put on the ballot paper in a referendum? There are people who would not want to support a final deal but who would not countenance staying in the European Union.

Sir Edward Davey: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s question as it enables me to explain that in detail. We are arguing for a people’s vote. People should have the final say when the deal is done, not before, so that they have the details of the question. One of the problems with the 2016 referendum was that no one knew what Brexit meant; in fact, we still do not. When we do eventually know—when there is a deal for people to look at, touch and feel—we suggest that the people should have the final say about whether that is what they want or whether they would prefer to stay in the European Union.

We need to look at what the Government have achieved so far. The process has been far longer than people were told. People were told it would be easy and that it would be quick, but after two years we still do not have a policy or a White Paper. We were told that Brexit would be very good value for money. We were not told that it would be so costly. No one said that Brexit would cost £41 billion—and that divorce bill is going to go even higher. It is costing far more than people were told, but it is also far more complex than people were promised. People were sold simple truths: it would be easy to extricate ourselves from our friends and neighbours who we have worked with for so long for over four decades. It is clear that that is not the case. There still is no deal. Frankly, given the performance and shocking chaos of the past 48 hours, that deal looks a long way away.

Steve Double: I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has just said that we do not know what Brexit is going to be. I agree: we do not know what the final agreement is going to be. We do not know the detail, so how is he so sure that it will be disaster?

Sir Edward Davey: As my hon. Friends have already said, we have the best deal now. It is pretty clear that we were prospering over 40 years. We have moved from being the sick man of Europe to one that was leading on the environment and leading on the economy. That happened during our time as a member of the European Union. The deal we have at the moment is the best possible deal. Anything different is going to be far worse.

I want to take on an argument put forward by those on the Conservative Benches that somehow having a people’s vote would undermine our negotiating position. Madam Deputy Speaker, does anyone in this House seriously believe that what we have seen from the Government is strengthening our negotiating position? What a disaster! I wonder whether Conservative Members ever talk to anyone from France, Germany, Italy or any of the other 27 member countries. They see us as a laughing stock. Our stock as a country has fallen. We used to be highly regarded for our diplomatic skills, for our leadership and for our stability. In a short time, this discredited Conservative Government have made us the laughing stock not just of Europe but of the developed world.

As a Minister in the coalition Government, I attended five European Councils, first as a junior Business Minister and then as Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change. Over five years, I was involved in a whole set of negotiations in Europe: on the economy delivering a growth package, which was very much written here in London; and on an energy and climate change package, which was very much written here in London. My experience was that we could always win for Britain, completely contrary to the nonsense we hear from so many Brexiteers. Moreover, people listened to us. When we engaged in proper negotiations and proper politics, we could always win the day. I have been disappointed, angered and distressed by the appalling inability of the Government to negotiate—with themselves, frankly, let alone the European Union. Their attempt to try to build those relationships, which are critical in a successful negotiation, has failed lamentably.

I want to end with one problem that I have with the Chequers statement. The Minister was unable to answer it and the Prime Minister was unable to answer it during her statement on Monday. It is important in relation to the negotiations with Europe and to what this Parliament eventually decides. If there is a new rule produced by our EU colleagues relating to the single market for goods, this House will have the freedom to vote on it. That sounds very enticing to a Brexiteer: we will have the freedom to do that, we have taken back control and so on. What has not been spelled out is what happens if this House votes to reject such a new rule. It is absolutely clear that were the House to do that, the whole agreement that we negotiate with Brussels will collapse. This is going to be one of the key questions during the negotiations and during deliberations in this House. I think it is one of the questions on which the Chequers statement will fail.

This country and this House need better leadership. We have not got it and I fear we are not going to get it. That is the reason why this House needs to give the people the final say.

4.29 pm

Vera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I would gladly take up the challenge to stand up for a people’s vote in my constituency. Like my hon. Friend the Member for
Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), my postbag in Bath is full of letters from constituents who are worried sick about Brexit. We speak endlessly in Bath about the most important issue facing our nation, and I think that is a good thing. That is democracy and I trust people. That is why I think that the people should take back control, but if we are having a debate, I wish it was much more along the lines of why the European Union is the best place for us.

The European Union is the greatest peace project in the modern era, with 28 countries working together, resolving differences peacefully. It is too little understood that countries with competing interests work together through a rules-based system—the rule of law and common regulations. Each country within the European Union passes its own laws, but those laws must be applicable as fairly to its own citizens as to the citizens of the other 27 countries. That is called solidarity. It delivers justice and greater opportunity. We help other countries and other countries help us. We all benefit.

Looking back to June 2016 and the debate we had leading up to that referendum, where were these arguments? There were arguments about pennies: “What is in it for us?” and “£350 million a week for the NHS” on one side, and “Economic meltdown the day after the referendum” on the other side. Then there was the “taking back control” argument. Sixty million Turks would arrive at our borders, swamping the country. It was a Conservative-on-Conservative referendum, and two years on, why are the Conservatives making such a mess of it? Because for them, every argument is still framed within British-only interests. There is never anything about 28 countries working together. It is only ever about a narrow self-interest.

**Lloyd Russell-Moyle:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Wera Hobhouse:** I really cannot because we have very little time left. The Conservative Brexit vision is for a Britain and a Europe from before the European Union was formed. Their vision is for a continent of competing nation states, but the profound vision of the EU—we see this most clearly in the island of Ireland—is that people can have multiple identities. We can be British and Irish, British, French, and British and Polish. To be British and Irish is to have no border in Ireland, but it also means staying in the single market and in the customs union. People are now beginning to realise that it is also about staying in the European Union.

**Gareth Snell:** Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Wera Hobhouse:** Okay, I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Gareth Snell:** Many of my constituents would describe themselves as British-Pakistani. To suggest that somehow people can only retain that identity if we have some sort of open-border policy is somewhat ridiculous.

**Wera Hobhouse:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and absolutely—I passionately believe in multiple identities and I used to live in an area in the north of England where there were many people with Muslim and British identities. However, I think that, in this country, we simply fail to understand the idea of multiple identities, and in the Brexit debate, that is also a big failure.

Where do we go from here? In June 2016, the people voted narrowly to leave the European Union. Liberal Democrats believe that it was not a blank cheque to this Government, or indeed any Government, to do anything that they like. Democracy did not stop in June 2016, but it seems for this Government that it did. The will of the people on that date is their mandate for anything that they want to do now. The shocking thing is that the politicians who argue that they are enacting the will of the people are the same politicians who refuse to ask the people again now, after many things have changed—after we are not getting £350 million back for the NHS and after we know how complicated it is to extract ourselves from the customs union without creating a border in Northern Ireland.

Ask the people again. From Magna Carta onwards, democracy in this country had to be fought for. The people have woken up to this. This Government are acting in the name of the people without the people’s consent. Ask the people now. The people must finish what the people have started.

4.34 pm

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): It is a pleasure to sum up at the end of this debate, to which there have been many contributions by Members from throughout the House. I will start with the comments of the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), who is no longer in her place. She gave defending the Government’s position on Brexit her best shot; as a remainder, she knows that it will do and is doing us great harm. I give her credit for at least trying to present the Government’s policies in the best possible light.

The hon. Member for Darlington (Jenny Chapman), who speaks for the main Opposition, said that the Labour party did not want an exit from Brexit or a final say on the deal. That will come as a surprise to the majority of her party members, who support a final say on the deal and an exit from Brexit. She went on to say, following an intervention—I think this was meant to be a clarification—that the Labour party was not calling for a final say on the deal but was leaving open the option of one. We can read into that whatever we want. I read into it that the Labour party is preparing a position that it might move to at some point in the near future. We hope that that will happen at the Labour autumn conference, and we welcome the flexibility that the hon. Lady outlined.

The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) said, perhaps rather surprisingly, that his views did not matter. I suppose that depends on whether he thinks we are delegates or representatives in this place. I think that the views of Members of Parliament matter, and that we are not here simply to deliver something that has been voted for by a majority of our constituents, particularly if we know that it will do us a huge amount of harm. The hon. Gentleman and other Members have held out the idea that fisheries, for instance, will benefit heavily. As I understand it, however, even when we are out of the common fisheries policy, the UN law of the sea will still apply, so the idea that no other country will be able to access our waters does not bear scrutiny.

I was pleased that the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) spoke in support of the motion. He set out, in stark terms, the economic damage that
the Government know Brexit will cause us, and in an intervention he rightly highlighted the fantasy jobs Brexit on offer from the Labour party. I am afraid that the Labour spokesperson could not provide any evidence at all to back up her suggestion that there was a jobs Brexit out there.

The only thing I will say for the speech of the hon. Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson) is that it was very short. However short it was, it was long enough for me to note that I disagreed with every single word in it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) rightly concentrated on food poverty, and he gave a concrete example of some of the potential consequences of Brexit. Thanks to an intervention, which I do not think was supposed to be helpful, he was able to list all the things we managed to do while we were in government, such as taking millions of people off tax, creating millions of extra jobs and introducing the pensions triple lock and the pupil premium. Those things were all achieved in a five-year period of strong and stable government, on which I am sure everyone in this country looks back nostalgically as they watch the Tory party tearing itself apart and shedding Ministers on a daily basis.

The hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) said that business wanted certainty. As I said in an intervention on one of his colleagues, the only thing that is certain is that any model of Brexit that the Government adopt will damage business. If he wants certainty, that is the certainty that business can rely on.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), who is clearly not a Liberal Democrat supporter, rightly said that if we become involved in a campaign for a final say on the deal, we must sell the positives of the European Union, which was not done during the referendum a couple of years ago. There is public support for a final say on the deal, and, indeed, there is public support from members of Unite. As I am sure the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central will be pleased to hear, a net plus-23% of them support a vote on the final deal. We accept that the only way we could legitimately secure an exit from Brexit would be through a final say on the deal that everyone in the country could take part in.

Gareth Snell rose—

**Tom Brake**: I will not give way now, but I may do so in a moment if I have a bit of time.

The hon. Gentleman also said that a policy debate was absent. Let me point out to him that we will not be having a policy debate in this place for the next four or five years, because this Government and any successor Government will have to focus on delivering Brexit. That will take three, four or five years, so the hon. Gentleman can put any policy debate that he wants on hold. We will also be financially worse off. I am sure that the Government will not want to challenge the Office for Budget Responsibility, which says that Brexit will cost £15 billion a year. We are calling for a Brexit dividend, which would mean abandoning Brexit and grabbing that £15 billion a year. No doubt the UK Statistics Authority would be happy to support that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran) was right to point out that throughout the Brexit debate the Government have ignored the 48%. I have intervened on the Prime Minister and given her an opportunity to stand up for the 48%, but she has not done so; she has stood up for the 52% instead. I commend my hon. Friend for adopting the Leader of the Opposition’s tactic of bringing individuals into these issues, because we do need to hear from real people—real people with real issues to address, whether they are fishermen, residents of Northern Ireland or, indeed, business owners. It is better to hear from them than it is to hear from some of the ideologues on the Government Benches—and, indeed, a few on the Opposition Benches—whose ideology drives them to abandon their common sense so that they cannot see the consequences of what they are advocating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh West (Christine Jardine) rightly focused on the contribution of EU citizens and European schemes such as Erasmus, and also on one of the things that makes me most angry—the obstacles that the Government are putting in the way of young people’s rights to live, work and study abroad.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse) rightly said that if we become involved in a campaign for a final say on the deal, we must sell the positives of the European Union, which was not done during the referendum a couple of years ago. There is public support for a final say on the deal, and, indeed, there is public support from members of Unite. As I am sure the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central will be pleased to hear, a net plus-23% of them support a vote on the final deal. So union members are calling for it, and I welcome that, but there is political support for it as well.

It is with great pleasure that I quote what the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) said:

“If a democracy cannot change its mind, it ceases to be a democracy.”

The right hon. Gentleman has, of course, been replaced as Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union by the hon. Member for Esher and Walton (Dominic Raab). What did the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union have to say on the matter a couple of years ago? He said:

“Tory MPs may push for second referendum after 2020 if Remain win”.

I am happy to pray in aid the support of both the outgoing Brexit Secretary of State and the incoming one for a final say on the deal and a chance for people to have an exit from Brexit.

**Graham Stringer**: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier in the debate, I asked the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable) why, if he was so keen on referendums, the Liberal Democrats—and, in particular—had not voted for a referendum on the Lisbon treaty in 2008. He said that they had.

Since then I have had the opportunity to check the *Official Report*, and I can tell the House that on 5 March 2008—this is in column 189—an amendment of Liberal Democrats did vote for a referendum, but the right hon. Member for Twickenham did not. Nor did the then leader of the Liberal Democrats or the vast majority of
the Liberal Democrats, because it was against their official policy. I should like your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker, on the fact that the right hon. Gentleman misled the House of Commons.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): That is not a point of order, it is a matter of debate. The House has heard what the hon. Gentleman had to say, and perhaps there will be opportunities for Liberal Democrats to intervene on the Minister, but I do want to move on to the Minister’s summing up.

4.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): The British public had to wait 41 years from 1975 for another referendum on EU membership, and while we have heard today that some may hope another one comes along very shortly, they do not represent a majority either in this House or in the country.

We have heard some excellent speeches in this debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) pointed out the ludicrous position whereby Lib Dems in Scotland are so clearly opposing a second indyref while arguing that a second referendum on EU exit is vital. He also spoke very well about the sea of opportunity for Scottish fishermen as we leave the common fisheries policy.

We heard a brilliant, short and direct speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson), and I agreed with every word that he said. My hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) clearly set out why, by ignoring the views of the electorate, the Lib Dems lost the support of people in Cornwall, and how his constituents, like mine, want to see the Government getting on with the job. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Dartington (Jenny Chapman) for a strong and typically humorous speech from the Opposition Front Bench, and to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), who spoke against the motion.

The referendum question agreed by this Parliament and presented to the people was simply whether we should leave the EU or remain in it; it was as simple as that. Parliament attached no conditions or caveats to that vote. The people voted to leave, and that is what the Government are delivering. I would be the first to accept that we must do so in a way that brings people together whether they voted leave or remain and that secures the best interests of our economy, and that is exactly what this Conservative Government are seeking to do. We have heard a great deal of nostalgia from Lib Dem MPs for their time in government, but we do not need job applications from former Lib Dem Ministers in search of a ministerial car to enable us to deliver for the economy.

Stephen Gethins rose—

Mr Walker: I will give way in a moment.

Some Members have suggested today that the Government have not made progress in negotiations with the EU, but I would contest that. The vast majority of the withdrawal agreement is now agreed and we remain on track to finalise its terms, alongside agreeing the framework for our future relationship, by October. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) for their work on that process. I noted the kind comments of the hon. Member for North East Fife (Stephen Gethins) about the courtesy with which he was always treated by my right hon. Friend, and I will give way to the hon. Gentleman now.

Stephen Gethins: The Minister talks about reaching out. Can he tell the House one area this Government have changed because of an intervention from the Opposition Benches or from a devolved Administration that the Conservatives would not have taken on board otherwise?

Mr Walker: We have listened very carefully to views across the whole House. I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends speaking about Erasmus. As the Prime Minister set out in her Mansion House speech, we are seeking cultural and educational co-operation with the EU. That is an issue on which Members across the House can agree and, of course, there have been many other issues where we have listened. During the passage of the EU withdrawal Act, we listened to views across the House and engaged on those. I personally was very pleased that we were able to engage with the cross-party amendment in the Lords on the Good Friday agreement—the one supported by Labour’s Lord Murphy and my noble Friend Lord Patten.

In March we reached a significant milestone, reaching agreement on wide areas of the withdrawal agreement, locking down the full chapters on citizens’ rights and the financial settlement, and providing certainty to businesses and individuals, with both sides committing in principle to a time-limited implementation period. Last month, building on the progress made in March, the UK and EU negotiating teams made further significant progress towards finalising the withdrawal agreement, with the majority of text on other separation issues now agreed. These cover a range of areas, including arrangements for goods on the market, Euratom-related issues, and co-operation in civil and commercial matters. We have had constructive discussions with the EU on the few remaining issues in the text, including data, justice and judicial co-operation in criminal matters, and governance arrangements for the agreement, and we look forward to finalising all these areas soon.

Under the terms of article 50, we are also in the process of negotiating the framework for our future relationship with the EU. Last weekend at Chequers, the Cabinet agreed the collective position on the UK’s proposals for that future relationship. This will create a free trade area between the UK and the EU which establishes a common rulebook for industrial goods. The hon. Member for Westminster and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) spoke about the importance of that to food and agriculture. High standards will be maintained, but we will also ensure that no new changes take place without the approval of our Parliament. We will have a new business-friendly customs model, with freedom to strike new trade deals around the world. These proposals avoid frictions in trade, protect jobs and livelihoods and, crucially, meet the commitments made by both sides to avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland. Even the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Sir Vince Cable), in opening the debate, recognised that as an advance, but it represents the consistent position of this Government.
Tom Brake: The Minister is painting a glowing picture of the deal that the Government are putting together. He might not have been on Twitter this afternoon, but I understand that two Tory vice-chairs have just resigned. How come they do not see this in quite the same terms as he does?

Mr Walker: I would say to the right hon. Gentleman that individuals’ decisions are up to those individuals.

We are clear that we are presenting a constructive approach to these negotiations to secure the right deal between the UK and the European Union. On Thursday, we will publish a White Paper that will set out in more detail how we will be taking back control of our money, our laws and our borders. It will also set out the nature of the deep and special relationship that the UK seeks with the EU after Brexit. It will be one that includes some of the issues that Liberal Democrat Members have talked about as though they might disappear, such as Erasmus and Horizon 2020, where we are seeking a constructive approach to being able to work together in the future.

Bob Stewart: It would be extremely nice to have a constructive approach to the negotiations from the European Union. We keep talking about the deal that we are trying to put together, but I would really like to hear what the European Union’s suggestions are, because I have heard nothing on that.

Mr Walker: My hon. Friend makes his point powerfully, but we need to ensure that we allow ourselves to take the right approach and the constructive approach to the negotiations. Many Members on both sides of the House have identified the damage that would be done to the negotiating process by signalling to the European Union that, if it were to take a tough stance and allow the talks to break down, the British people would simply decide to pay in and still send vast sums of money. The right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) confirmed that it was the position of the Liberal Democrats to ask the question at the end of the process: “Do you like the deal that is on offer, or do you simply want to stay in the European Union?” If we set out that question right now to ask at the end of the process, there would be no incentive for the European Union to engage constructively with the negotiations over the coming months. It is naive in the extreme to think that the EU would continue to negotiate in good faith on that basis.

Sir Edward Davey: Will the Minister answer a question that the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), failed to answer? In the Chequers statement, the Prime Minister stated that a new rule for the EU rulebook would be considered by this House and that we would have a chance to vote on it. Will he explain what would happen if the House were to reject a proposed new rule to add to the EU rulebook?

Mr Walker: I say to the right hon. Gentleman that we want to bring to the House an agreement between the UK and the EU that the whole House will want to support. There will be more detail on the precise measures in the White Paper that we are bringing forward at the end of this week—

Sir Edward Davey: So you’re not going to answer the question.

Mr Walker: I say to the right hon. Gentleman, and to the hon. Member for Oxford West and Abingdon (Layla Moran), who spoke about the results of the 2017 election in her own constituency, that they should pay attention to the fact that more than 80% of the people who voted in that general election voted for parties that had made it clear that they would respect the result of the referendum. The 8% who voted for the Liberal Democrat party do not represent a majority in the country or a significant shift of opinion on this issue. We are at a critical point in our negotiations, and we simply could not afford the distraction of this debate about a second referendum. What we need to do now is to progress our negotiations with the European Union in order to achieve the right outcome. The approach agreed by the Cabinet at Chequers is a constructive way forward. We are seeking to get the best deal for the UK as a whole, and we intend to negotiate under the best possible conditions. To do otherwise would be irresponsible in the extreme.

Gareth Snell: Does the Minister share my assessment that by pushing for a second referendum the Liberal Democrat no-deal fanatics are actually making no deal more likely, because they are making getting a good deal more difficult?

Mr Walker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I did not agree with some of his speech, but he just made a strong point. We must ensure that both sides understand the need to engage constructively in the negotiations over the months ahead to seek a new relationship between the UK and the EU. I have great respect for the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), who made a passionate speech singing the praises of the EU and its model of bringing countries together. I understand the case that she makes, but it was also made during the EU referendum, when the British people decided not to consent to continued participation in that political project. We must respect that crucial decision. The Government have been clear in all such debates that our position respecting the referendum has remained the same. We said ahead of and at the time of the 2016 referendum that we would respect the result, and that remains the case. It is interesting that those on the Opposition Benches who support the idea of a second referendum only discovered their desire after being on the losing side.

On the night of the referendum, as we have already heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole, Lord Ashdown, perhaps in anticipation of a different outcome, said:

“I will forgive no one who does not respect the sovereign voice of the British people once it has spoken. Whether it is a majority of 1% or 20%, when the British people have spoken you do what they command. Either you believe in democracy or you do not.”

What does it say about the faith in the judgment of the British people of those who support such sentiments if they simply wish to ask the same question again in the hope of getting a different answer? As the hon. Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, it is a case of “Keep voting until you agree with us.”

The British people voted to leave the European Union, and it is the duty of this Government and this Parliament to deliver on their instruction. We have done so by
voting overwhelmingly to trigger article 50 and by passing essential legislation, such as the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Petitions brought to this House for debate have repeatedly failed to garner the support of the House. Our position on this issue is therefore clear, and we have repeatedly said that there will be no second referendum or, as the right hon. Member for Twickenham suggested earlier, a third one.

John Lamont: Does the Minister agree that opinion polls show that there is no support for a second referendum? The Liberal Democrats claim that there is support for a referendum. Whether in Scotland, England or Northern Ireland, our constituents want us to get on with the process and get on with it we will. However, some things are worth re-running, including the wise words of the right hon. Member for Twickenham, who is no longer in his place—[Interruption.] My apologies; he has moved.

We are determined to make a success of Brexit and we are working hard and at pace to get the best deal possible: an agreement that is in the mutual interests of both the United Kingdom and the European Union that delivers on the British people’s decision on Brexit in a pragmatic way without re-running and re-fighting the referendum. Whether in Scotland, England or Northern Ireland, our constituents want us to get on with the process and get on with it we will. However, some things are worth re-running, including the wise words of the right hon. Member for Twickenham, who is no longer in his place.

I therefore urge the House to reject this motion.

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 13, Noes 299.

Division No. 205

[4.59 pm]

AYES

Blackman, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bottomley, Sir Peter
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Brecrest, Jack
Bridgen, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brokenshire, rh James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Campbell, Mr Gregory
Carditoge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caufield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chishti, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverly, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Therese
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glynn
Davies, Philip
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanoglo, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Dodds, rh Nigel
Donaldson, rh Sir Jeffrey M.
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Drax, Richard
Duguid, David
Dunsmuir, Scotland, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evansnett, rh Sir David
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Frazer, Lucy
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike

NOES

Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger
Garner, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Girvan, Paul
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Halfon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinsrake, Kevin
Hollubone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawarna, Mr Ranil
Jenkins, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jenrick, Robert
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Johnson, Joseph
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi

Brake, rh Tom
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Davey, rh Sir Edward
Edwards, Jonathan
Farron, Tim
Hobhouse, Wera
Jardine, Christine
Lake, Ben

AYES

Lamb, rh Norman
Lucas, Caroline
Moran, Layla
Saville Roberts, Liz
Stone, Jamie

Tellers for the Ayes: Stephen Lloyd and Mr Alistair Carmichael

NOES

Adams, Nigel
Afolami, Bim
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Allan, Lucy
Allen, Heidi
Amess, Sir David
Andrew, Stuart
Argar, Edward
Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard
Badenoch, Mrs Kemi
Baker, Mr Steve
Baldwin, Harriet
Barclay, Stephen
Baron, Mr John
Bebb, Guto
Bellingham, Sir Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Question accordingly negatived.
well be good. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) has just assured me, and the House, that the individual candidates were excellent people and excellently well qualified candidates, but that is the argument made all the time by the bastions of privilege.

The people before us may well be excellent, but we do not know whether others who might have applied might have been incorporated had we actually had people from a multiverse. Indeed, what do we do? We employ headhunters. Who do headhunters look at? They go and look at people they already know; they look at people who are already part of the circle. These jobs are reasonably well remunerated: £20,000 for 25 days. Many of my constituents would say, “Very nice work if you can get it.” Indeed, I do not know whether this is the same as some other appointments that we made where people were paid half-a-day’s pay for reading the papers before the meeting, and indeed a half-day’s stipend for attending a dinner the night before to talk over the issues with their colleagues.

As my hon. Friend has said, the qualifications of the individuals are impressive. Rima Makarem is currently audit chair at the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, chair of the National Travel Health Network and Centre, audit chair at University College London Hospitals, trustee of the UCLH Charity, independent council member of St George’s, University of London, and, as my hon. Friend rightly said, has held some other previous roles as well. Quite frankly, with the problems that the health service has, I would have thought she would be busy enough dealing with those roles in the health service, rather than taking on yet another quango role.

Jane McCall has previously undertaken several non-executive roles within the health, housing and procurement sectors, including at the Office of Legal Complaints—the board of the Legal Ombudsman—and deputy chair of University Hospital of South Manchester, which is the Wythenshawe hospital. She is a non-executive director at the Information Commissioner’s Office and chair of Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust. There is a whole range. This is what we always do with selections, and it has become worse over time. If one looks back, one can see that there were very often local councillors on local health boards—quite often, quite senior local councillors and leaders of our great cities and, I say to Conservative colleagues, leaders in the shires as well. They were people who had experience of running organisations but also knew about the conditions in the locality and the situation on the ground.

We had business people previously. I understand that one of the candidates had previously worked in a multinational. We had not just those who had worked in multinationals; there were those who ran medium-sized businesses in the localities. There were those who had created start-ups, had built up businesses and then wanted to give something back to the community, which is a long-standing tradition in our country. In my neighbouring borough, in Birmingham, Joseph Chamberlain made his fortune in the nuts and bolts industry. His main factory lies in my constituency. Having made that fortune, he became a civic leader and transformed that great city, the second city of our country. Those sorts of people no longer appear on the lists that we are regularly presented with or on the endless lists of appointments. It is all from the revolving quangocracy.

I am told by Members from rural areas that farmers with knowledge of the rural economy no longer get a look in. Trade unionists, whether conveners or local officials who really know local circumstances, were regularly on local and national boards; a number used to be in the House of Lords. When the post-war Labour Government nationalised the electricity industry, they put Lord Walter Citrine in charge. He was former assistant general secretary of the Electrical Trades Union, my own union, and also the former famous and outstanding general secretary of the Trades Union Congress. He was one of those who founded the free trade union movement after the second world war, in opposition to the Communist International. Such people were substantial people and they were the people Governments used to put into these positions—but no longer.

Both of the nominees may well be excellent candidates, with a good record in the health service, but if we are to have people from the health service, why not a doctor or a nurse, a paramedic, a technician or a care assistant—people who are working on the frontline in the health service? Why are we not putting those people into these positions? It is because they are not part of the magic circle or part of the group that people are always look up on the computer or previously on the rolodex. Employing headhunters exacerbates that situation, as well as needlessly and uselessly contributing to our costs.

That is the problem. There are all those ordinary people in all of those different groupings. Other Members may well think of other groups. If we were to look at transport, there are those who work in that industry and may know a bit about it. It is a similar situation with the regulation of ports, and right the way through the panoply of all these various quangos. But these people do not meet the mandarins at the dinner parties and the cocktail parties. They get on with their jobs and get on with their lives, but they are not part of that magic circle.

As I say, I do not object to this motion with any personal animus towards these two individuals, whom I know not. I object to the continuation in this House, but much more widely across the civil service, of the process of selecting from a very small group, and all the time widening the gap between those who are making the decisions in administering such bodies and ordinary people who are actually affected by those decisions.

5.25 pm

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): I thank Dame Janet Gaymer for the work that she has done on the Commission. I welcome the appointment of Dr Rima Makarem and the extension of the appointment of Jane McCall, who has given some excellent advice to the Commission over the years. I look forward to Dr Makarem, in particular, contributing in the same way that Dame Janet has, to great effect, on the Commission.

I take a slight issue with the right hon. Member for Warrington (John Spellar). I agree with him in principle that it should not simply be the usual suspects who are appointed to the usual positions. I can say, however, unusually defending the establishment—that the Commission, when it is appointing and employing, is very conscious indeed of the need to look beyond the usual suspects. It makes sure that it looks specifically at gender balance, sexuality, and those from more
disadvantaged backgrounds. Indeed—we have had this discussion on a number of occasions—it looks at class, so that those who are being appointed and employed have different accents, educational backgrounds and life experiences.

Clearly, however, when we contract out a job like this, candidates are found and interviewed, and the best person is appointed. I hope that one day it might not be the usual suspects, as the right hon. Gentleman might have it, but for today, I believe that the Commission has appointed the right person.

John Spellar: The hon. Gentleman again falls into the trap of saying that the best person is appointed. If we determine the criteria as to what we are trying to achieve, we determine the outcome. That is what happens when we appoint headhunters and put in certain specifications such as a legal background, an accountancy background or experience in HR management. The outcome is prejudiced against all the groups that I described who are being excluded.

Stewart Hosie: I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. However, the criteria that had to be set were for independent commissioners to sit on the Commission to advise, from different experience, on dealing with the management of what is effectively a small town, with all the HR and technical requirements. Of course there have to be criteria. One would not appoint a bricklayer, a plumber or a sparky without specifying that they could lay bricks or put the electricity blocks in place correctly and safely, and the same applies to the appointment of the non-executive posts on the Commission.

I did not want to have a bunfight over this with the right hon. Gentleman, because I actually agree with him in principle. I simply wanted to thank Dame Janet for her work, welcome the extension of Jane’s appointment, and welcome Rima Makarem’s appointment to the Commission from October.
NHS Trusts: Accountability

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Rebecca Harris.)

5.31 pm

Sir Mike Penning (Hemel Hempstead) (Con): It is a privilege to have so long for this Adjournment debate on such an important subject. I know that when other colleagues realise that the debate has started, they will scamper to the Chamber. When I put down the title for this debate, I did not intend it to be a general debate, but when I have raised this issue in the House, many colleagues and those on the Front Bench have acknowledged it, particularly when I have raised it with the Leader of the House at business questions.

The NHS is not owned by politicians. It is not owned by doctors and nurses, and it certainly is not run by the bureaucrats in charge of the NHS. It is owned by the people. The people’s NHS was founded 70 years ago, which we are celebrating today. I would never advocate that we go back to the time when politicians and Ministers ran the NHS, but we are in a situation now where the bureaucrats who run the NHS have very little accountability. Time and again, my constituents say to me, “Why are they not listening to us? Why are they not listening to you, my MP? At the end of the day, you represent us in the House of Commons—you are there to represent our money.” That is the principle of our democracy today and has been the founding principle ever since we first elected people to this House over 900 years ago.

I find it amazing when we question the clinical commissioning group or one of the numerous trusts in my constituency. I never understand why, in a small county like mine, we have so many NHS trusts, acute trusts, mental health trusts and community trusts. The people do not understand it. They just see an NHS. They do not realise or want to know how many chief executives, finance directors or directors of nursing there are. They just want to be looked after by the NHS, which was the promise when the NHS was founded. They do not understand it. They just see an NHS.

There are a couple of examples from my constituency that might resonate with colleagues around the House, which was the promise when the NHS was founded. I find it amazing when we question the clinical commissioning group or one of the numerous trusts in my constituency. I never understand why, in a small county like mine, we have so many NHS trusts, acute trusts, mental health trusts and community trusts. The people do not understand it. They just see an NHS. They do not realise or want to know how many chief executives, finance directors or directors of nursing there are. They just want to be looked after by the NHS, which was the promise when the NHS was founded.

A few years ago in my constituency, we lost the NHS as it may have happened in their constituencies as well. That might resonate with colleagues around the House, which was the promise when the NHS was founded. They do not understand it. They just see an NHS.

I find it amazing when we question the clinical commissioning group or one of the numerous trusts in my constituency. I never understand why, in a small county like mine, we have so many NHS trusts, acute trusts, mental health trusts and community trusts. The people do not understand it. They just see an NHS. They do not realise or want to know how many chief executives, finance directors or directors of nursing there are. They just want to be looked after by the NHS, which was the promise when the NHS was founded.

There are a couple of examples from my constituency that might resonate with colleagues around the House, which was the promise when the NHS was founded. They do not understand it. They just see an NHS.

The gentleman’s name was Jan Filochowski. I know Hansard will ask me to spell that name later, and I will attempt to help them as much as I can, but anybody in my part of the world who will know who that gentleman is. I did not have any particular gripe with Jan. I completely disagreed with him when he continued to do, but I did have one specific gripe, as did the hospital action group in my part of the world. In particular, Mr Ron Glatter picked up the argument, and I fired off several really important questions to the NHS regional health authority: “Hold up a second, has this person got this job now? Has he been appointed, and if he has, when was it advertised, and when was he interviewed?”

Sometime down the line—hidden with lots of mirrors in lots of different parts of the NHS—it was revealed that the gentleman had got the job without it being advertised and without being interviewed for it. However, because he had been given a contract, it would have been too expensive to remove him and to start again from scratch. We eventually found out that his remuneration package was in excess of £300,000, which is well over twice what the Prime Minister of this country earns. I accept that someone does not become the Prime Minister to earn a lot of money—clearly, there are other reasons why someone becomes Prime Minister—but surely, within the NHS of all places, that sort of remuneration package is not only excessive, but actually sick. The money that person was earning! I am sure there are others who are earning close to that, perhaps more or perhaps slightly less.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): Does it not get even worse, in that individuals who fail in such jobs are given pay-offs to get them out of the hospital, but in a fairly short space of time the magic circle again fits them up with an appointment in another hospital, where they again fail and again cost huge sums of money?

Sir Mike Penning: The right hon. Gentleman did not stay very long, but he caused carnage in our NHS trust and morale went through the floor. I am sure some of the books might have looked a bit better, but certainly acute care was really struggling. The gentleman left after two years, or something like that, and he went to Great Ormond Street Hospital as the chief executive. I am sure he went on a huge pay cut—no, I am being cynical: I doubt it. He has now retired.

On the right hon. Gentleman’s point, before that gentleman there was another chief executive involved in investing in our health, who went off under a cloud. I managed to get him summoned to the Health Committee, when I was a member of it, to find out the truth about what was happening with the closure programmes. The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right because, a few years later, he appeared back in my constituency as the chief executive of the community trust. He then had the audacity to ask, “Can we put all that behind us, as this is a new job and a different project for me?” Yes, it goes full circle: just as the right hon. Gentleman said in the previous debate, it is jobs for the boys, and they come back round again.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing this debate, in which he is highlighting a very specific issue. Does he not agree that there is a duty of care on Government-funded bodies, which quite clearly pay people from Government funds, to ensure that employees at every level are accountable to trusts? More must be done to inspire confidence in the NHS—this is quite clearly a confidence issue—as well as to provide transparency and clear accountability.

Sir Mike Penning: I could not agree more with the hon. Gentleman. We have discussed and debated this before, and this must be like “Groundhog Day” for the
Minister. I should have thanked him earlier for bearing with me in what may be a much longer debate than he probably assumed when he saw it on the Order Paper.

It is important that there is proper due process when we employ people who work in the NHS, and in relation to salaries. I am sure that the Minister will now go away and check with the Treasury how this happened. My understanding was that such remuneration—and we are going back a couple of years—would not have been allowed even then. Trust in the NHS is vital. There are other examples, which I will produce, that will show that although the NHS is absolutely world renowned, there are errors in it that infuriate the people who it is supposed to be representing and looking after.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is a timely debate. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar): it seems to me that a game of musical chairs is going on. We see chief executives who leave under questionable circumstances get a job outside the NHS and then turn up at another trust somewhere else. There does not seem to be any accountability.

As politicians, we are often accused of being remote, but nobody is more remote than people at some of the trusts I have looked at. Someone trying to get information from them about their budgets and where the expenditure goes has a job on their hands. It is about time that how the Department is run is looked at; it gives directions to the rest of the chief executives in the country, even on appointments.

Sir Mike Penning: I agree almost completely; I would just say that sometimes these people do not even leave the NHS—they stay within the structure of the NHS, but just go to a different trust in a different part of the country. Then they just reappear again and again.

I have often wondered about something. A director of nursing should clearly have come up through the nursing ranks; I understand that. Clearly, also, clinicians have to be involved in the clinical side. But why does NHS management have to be completely incestuous in how it works? If someone started as a nurse or doctor, how on earth do they have the necessary qualifications to run a massive multi-million pound organisation? Yet that is how it seems to happen. It took a long time for Mr Ron Glatter to get the figures when he was challenged. When we eventually got them, it was like pulling teeth: “This is personal information.” When we eventually got them, it was like pulling teeth: “This is personal information.”

Mr Jim Cunningham: This is a tick-box exercise. Most of the time trusts cannot even get that right. In this particular case—I will come on to another case in a moment—we challenged it. We judicially reviewed it not once, but twice. But why should members of the public have to come together to raise money to judicially review such decisions? There is currently no other process with proper discussion and involvement of patients, which challenges the decisions we hear day in, day out.

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When we eventually got them, it was like pulling teeth: “This is personal information.” When we eventually got them, it was like pulling teeth: “This is personal information.”
Mr Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is being very gracious in giving way. We had a case involving two consultants. With one in particular, the case actually ended up in the courts. We have never been able to find out the cost of the litigation, but it was anywhere between £2 million and £4 million. On the one hand, the public has got to raise the money if they want to challenge something, but within the NHS itself, where resources are very scarce, a lot of money is wasted on litigation. This consultant was taken to task because he was a whistleblower. On the one hand they encourage whistleblowers, but if they do not like what the whistleblowers have to say they suspend them and eventually try to get rid of them through litigation.

Sir Mike Penning: I was coming on to that point, but let me meet it head on now. I speak to nurses and other frontline staff who look after my local patients, including some doctors, and they are petrified of telling their own MP what is going on in case of retribution. Perhaps the Minister will help me to get to the bottom of the number of gagging orders out there at the moment in my trust, whereby things have been settled and people have been gagged. The types of threats in the gagging orders that are put on them are very severe.

There was a consultation panel in my constituency about the future of health, and the people allowed on the panel had been gagged. These are members of the general public who have been told categorically not to talk to me. They are not to tell me what is going on in the NHS in my own local community. They will be thrown off the panel if they do, and it is worse for the staff who have gagging orders against them. This is very serious.

We see the amount of money the NHS uses in litigation, whereas our patients have to raise money themselves. The NHS seems to settle very easily when there are threats against it relating to malpractice or when something has gone wrong at the trivial end of things, but when things are really serious and deaths have taken place, down come the shutters. Nationally, we have seen what happens—it has happened recently in Gosport and in Staffordshire when I was a shadow Minister—unless they are close to retirement and are not going to put their pension at risk, they are not going to blow the whistle. What really upsets me is that although I was sent to this House to represent people and for them to be able to tell me, in confidence, anything that they needed to, so that between the two of us we could discuss how to take it forward—often without using their name, but if necessary we can—that is not happening. That really worries me an awful lot.

To go back to Nascot Lawn, we went to a judicial review. We have done that before in our part of the world. The judge sided with the patients, but all that happened—it was about process, of course—was that it went back to the CCG, which turned around and said, “We will consult slightly differently. We will address what the court said, and by the way, we are going to go ahead and do it.” It is a sham, and we should be honest about that in the House.

When we tried to prevent our acute hospital from being closed—I pay tribute to my community for that—we did everything in the world. We got a coffin on a trolley, and thousands of us pushed it from my A&E that was going to close to the nearest one at Watford hospital, which it was proposed people should go to, in order to show just how much passion there was. We managed to get the money together to go to judicial review—a lot of money; in excess of £60,000—and the judge said, “You have a moral case. You have an ethical case. I agree with you, but you don’t have a case in law because all the powers are with the trust and the PCT”, as it was then. I ask the Minister: how can it be right that people must be so concerned, not just in my constituency but elsewhere?

Lastly on this part of my speech, let me talk again about what happened when we lost our A&E. I have raised this in the House before, so the Minister knows what I am talking about. To go back a bit further, St Albans, Hemel Hempstead and Watford are covered by West Herts, and at one time all three had A&Es. We are a massively growing population. The largest town in Hertfordshire is Hemel, which will have a projected 20,000 new homes in the next 20 years. St Albans is expanding, and so is Watford. There was a consultation, but the public were ignored. The A&E was closed and made into an elective surgery facility in St Albans. The public promises to the people of St Albans were that Hemel’s A&E would look after them. It is not a particularly long ride—it is clearly not in St Albans town centre, but that was going to be that. However, a few years on, those responsible said, “Let’s shut Hemel’s A&E and move it to Watford, because that can look after West Herts,” so the promises went out the window. The public went mad in St Albans and in our area. They were all on the streets, and what did we get? An urgent care centre, some out-patient services and a fracture clinic. Really and truly, that is all that is left in Hemel.

Rachel Maclean: My right hon. Friend is generous in giving way a second time. Again, the parallels with Redditch are interesting. Does he agree that the problem for the public comes when they see that their town is growing and they feel that trusts have not planned for the future? That is exactly what we have in Redditch as well, because it is a new town and it is growing, and people do not understand how the future demand will be catered for in the trust’s plans.

Sir Mike Penning: That is absolutely what I hear every day in my constituency. I also hear, “What are you going to do about it, Mr MP? Get off your backside and do something about it!” I am doing everything I
possibly can—I am meeting Secretaries of State and trusts—but what happens? I get ignored, because I have no powers at all; it is all in the hands of bureaucrats.

Sir Mike Penning: If the A&E was closed without consultation, that is illegal. I think the Minister will confirm that it is illegal to make major changes to a community’s health provision without consultation.

He said that the A&E was closed after a bogus consultation, and everything moved to Watford. We were promised that it would all be okay, and that we would have a 24-hour urgent care centre manned by GPs. Let us go back to just before Christmas 2016. There had been chaos—and I mean chaos—at the acute admissions unit in Watford hospital, which has just recently come out of special measures. All the ambulances were getting held up in big bottlenecks at the A&E at Watford. The big, new, bright idea was that we would close the urgent care centre that had replaced the A&E in Hemel Hempstead, and that that would be okay.

I had a meeting with the chief executive of the trust, who told me, “Mike, we are only doing this on safety grounds, because we cannot get the GPs to cover the hours.” That was really surprising to me, because there is a GP drop-in centre in the next room—not across the other side of town or even in a different part of the complex, but in the next room. I was told, “That is a different contract. We can’t touch that, mate; it’s nothing to do with us.” The chief executive said to me, “Don’t worry, Mr Penning, we can’t close the 24-hour service, because we have not consulted. This is just a temporary, emergency measure.” She went on the local radio station—I did not ask her to do that—and reiterated exactly what she had told me. In fact, she went further and said that the centre would be closed for only a couple of months and that it would reopen, because it would be categorically illegal to change the hours without consultation.

Reducing the hours of an urgent care centre—which used to be an A&E—from 24 to 10 is a major thing. Eighteen months later, the trust consulted on a proposal to turn the 24-hour urgent care centre into an urgent treatment centre, which would shut at 10 pm. Perhaps the Minister can explain to the general public the real difference between an urgent care centre and an urgent treatment centre, because I struggled to do so. I know that there is a methodology within the Department, but all that Joe Blogs, my constituents, saw was a downgrading.

By the time of the consultation, the centre had already been closed for 18 months, so what choice did we have? We could not rewind the clock 18 months. The trust misled us by saying that the measure was temporary. The chief executive promised me that to my face, and she repeated that promise on the local radio station. That commitment was not worth the paper it was written on—or rather the voice that spoke it. My constituents have suffered a massive loss of trust in brand NHS. Their trust has been decimated, because promise after promise has been broken.

Naturally, the vast majority of consultation responses—do not quote me on this, but I think it was about 80%—said that the centre had to be open 24 hours. Guess what, Madam Deputy Speaker? It is not. It has been renamed an urgent treatment centre, and it closes, allegedly, at 10 o’clock at night. Within the last few days, however, a very senior person in my constituency whom I trust implicitly saw someone collapse outside the centre at approximately 9.30 pm—half an hour before it was supposed to close—but the doors were locked. It was only because a member of the public opened them from the inside that the patient was seen. The doors were not opened by the NHS staff who were inside, even though they must have known that the patient was there. I hope and pray that she is okay.

I am now told that the doors are regularly locked at any time after 9 pm. That is disastrous for my constituents when they turn up there, but many of them simply do not trust the centre to be open at night. What is going on? Naturally enough, although sometimes inappropriately, they go to the A&E at Watford, which is causing it even more of a problem—but can we get anyone to listen? No, we cannot.

Watford General Hospital is in the middle of Watford, next to a football club about which a great many of my constituents are passionate, Watford FC. It used to be the home of Saracens, and I am passionate about them as well. The hospital was built in Victorian days, and the best way to describe it is “not fit for purpose”. The people of Watford will probably say, “Please do not run down the hospital, because it might be closed”, and I fully understand that, but the truth is that we all need a new hospital.

Although, as we heard earlier from my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) about her area, the population is growing massively, we are now supposed to listen to the management telling us what they are likely to provide. I have attended meetings with the Secretary of State and NHS Improvement about the applications from my local acute trust and clinical commissioning group, and it petrifies me that yet again they are not going to listen—do not quote me on this, but it was said to me by the Minister, who knows that he has no powers and will be treated with the disrespect that I often receive; they just ignore us—but to the people whom they are supposed to be serving, and who pay their wages out of their taxes.

I am not a clinician, although I was a paramedic in the armed forces and I know a little bit, but surgeons, GPs and frontline senior nursing staff have been speaking to me privately. It is fundamentally wrong and dangerous to keep saying that Watford can cope with the ever-growing population of west Hertfordshire.

I have met representatives of NHS Improvement with a delegation from my hospital action group, led by the brilliant Betty Harris, with Edie Glatter and her team, Jan Maddern and others, and we have joined forces with a separate campaign from St Albans. We were promised that the NHS management, as they looked at the applications for healthcare regeneration in my part of the world, would ensure that the CCG and the acute trust had more than one option on the table, rather than just ploughing more money into the Victorian hospital. I know that there have been conversations about a
greenfield site, which is owned by us because it is Crown Estate land. It is by the M1, close to the M25, between St Albans and Hemel Hempstead. It is perfect for an acute facility—the infrastructure could not be bettered—but I think we are being ignored again. I cannot prove that, but it is my gut feeling, and it is certainly the feeling of the thousands of people in my constituency.

I am a loyal member of the Conservative party. I was a Minister for seven years in seven Departments, and I was on the Front Bench in opposition for four and a half years. I have to ask myself why I am supporting a Government who are allowing my constituents to be ignored. The Minister must not take this personally, but the present situation is crazy. The Department of Health and Social Care—I was not in that Department, but I have been in many others—actually has very little control over what is going on out there in our wonderful NHS. We have inspections, my local hospital goes into special measures and then comes out of it, it gets into debt and then comes out of it. However, the truth in my part of the world is that if NHS management are not accountable to Ministers or to me as their MP—and, much more importantly, are not accountable to the people whom they are supposed to be looking after—we have a serious problem. If my constituents cannot come to me and express their concern about what is going on in the NHS, there is a serious problem with our democracy, and that is something that I cannot live with.

6.4 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): I commend my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Sir Mike Penning) for bringing the important matter of NHS accountability before the House. No one who heard his remarks can doubt for one minute his passion both for the NHS and for ensuring that the services it provides meet the needs of his constituents. He is right in this month, when we mark the 70th anniversary of the NHS, to emphasise that the NHS belongs to the people—not to any specific party or group, but to the constituents it serves.

My right hon. Friend made a number of specific allegations. Having been a Minister, he will appreciate that I sought to bring those issues before the House in the way he has, it is difficult for me to comment on some of the specific points, but I commit to follow up with him after the debate on some of those issues. In particular, he raised a very concerning allegation regarding a constituent who had collapsed before 10 pm outside the urgent treatment centre. He is right that that centre should be open until 10 pm, so clearly that is a specific issue that I will be keen to explore with him.

My right hon. Friend raised concerns as to whether his constituents who have whistleblowne have in practice been gagged. As you are probably aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, as a member of the Public Accounts Committee, I spent a considerable amount of time and effort on that issue. In response to concerns raised by the PAC during that time, in 2013, the Government introduced guidance that banned gagging orders and a legal duty of candour. As this is the first time I have been at the Dispatch Box since the ministerial reshuffle, I am sure my right hon. Friend will join me in paying tribute to the outgoing Secretary of State, who is now Foreign Secretary, who made patient safety a central tenet of his time in the Department and, as part of that, spoke up for whistleblowers and for the value they offer to the NHS.

Sir Mike Penning: I must apologise to my colleague, the now Foreign Secretary, who was so generous with his time in seeing me. I hope that the new Health Secretary will not get so upset when I am banging on his door—perhaps as much as I was on the previous Health Secretary's door.

Stephen Barclay: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for recognising that in the House. I think that is widely shared across the NHS.

It is right that the Government are bringing forward the draft Bill to place the Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch on a legal footing. Indeed, trusts should disclose any pay settlements to NHS Improvement. Therefore, on the concern to which my right hon. Friend brought the House's attention—whether whistleblowers have been gagged and, if so, whether that has been induced through financial payment—both those breach the Government's guidelines and they would need to be reported to NHS Improvement. If he is able to share any specific allegations after this debate, I will be keen to explore them.

My right hon. Friend expressed concern that service changes are “all in the hands of bureaucrats” and I must take slight issue with that.

Sir Mike Penning: Only slight?

Stephen Barclay: Well, I must take issue with that point. First, my right hon. Friend is well aware that the Government have four tests that apply to service change that ensure the voice of patients is heard and in particular that service reconfigurations are clinically led and done at a local level. I draw attention to the work that Professor Tim Briggs and Professor Tim Evans are doing through the “Get it right first time” initiative, which is all about driving through change to service provision through the leadership of national clinicians working with local clinicians in order to get that service buy-in.

Sir Mike Penning: I do not want to take up too much more of the Minister's time, but I am afraid that, in parts of the country, certainly in mine, the requirement to consult is simply being ignored. I have given the House a classic example in which an urgent care centre was closed at night with no consultation at all. It took 18 months for a bogus consultation to take place on whether it should close at night. The changes are there to be seen by everyone. I know that the Minister is telling me all this in good faith but, as he has heard from colleagues on both sides of the House, on the frontline, in the real world, people are ignoring the guidelines, which is surely illegal.

Stephen Barclay: I shall just unbundle two separate points from my right hon. Friend's remarks. First, his point that these changes are all in the hands of the bureaucrats collides with the Government's own position, which is that there are four tests. What he is drawing out is not whether the guidance is there as a protection but whether it is being implemented operationally, and that obviously needs to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Secondly, he and I debated this issue in some detail in an Adjournment debate in March, when this specific point was explored more fully. The urgent care centre in question saw an average of seven patients between midnight and 8 am, and an average of four between 10 pm and midnight. So in the period between 10 pm
and the centre reopening at 8 am, an average of 11 patients were being seen. I suspect that that is why, at local level, the change was made. I appreciate that it was initially done on patient safety grounds, with the consultation following, as we explored previously.

Sir Mike Penning: This is a hugely emotive issue. Yes, the excuse was that the centre was closing at night on grounds of patient safety because it could not get a GP there, but it does not take 18 months to turn round and say, “Oh, by the way, the numbers weren’t there in the first place and that’s why we had to close the centre.” That was the excuse 18 months after it had been closed at night times. Whether the numbers are right or not—they are hugely contested by my constituents—it cannot be acceptable that no consultation took place for 18 months.

Stephen Barclay: As I have said, we did explore these issues in some detail in March, and I absolutely respect the conviction with which my right hon. Friend is championing the interests of his constituents.

In the spirit of balance, I draw my right hon. Friend’s attention to the fact that a number of enhancements have also been made, including the introduction of a number of bookable appointments through NHS 111, which includes a clinical assessment service to ensure that patients’ needs are medically assessed; the addition of near patient testing for some conditions, reducing waiting times and reducing the need for patients to attend Watford Hospital; and an improved IT system meaning that medical staff will be able to access patient records if they give their consent. The clinical commissioning group also expects the service to expand to include a greater skill mix of other professionals such as pharmacists, emergency care practitioners and community nursing staff, and to provide access to mental health services. This is not a static situation. Some improvements have been made, but I absolutely take on board the concerns that my right hon. Friend has raised.

My right hon. Friend has raised concerns about the hiring of leadership positions, particularly two chief executive roles. He will be aware that this point was also raised by the hon. Member for Blackpool South (Gordon Marsden) in respect of the chair of Blackpool Victoria Hospital in an Adjournment debate only last week. I also note that the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar) and the hon. Member for Coventry South (Mr Cunningham) have raised similar issues. It is right that the views of constituency Members should be taken on board as part of any consultation, because Members of Parliament interact with a wide spectrum of their electorate and they are obviously well placed to feed into such consultations. As a Minister, that is something I take very seriously, and working on the cross-party basis, I am always keen to hear from colleagues when concerns arise.

That goes back to my right hon. Friend’s point about trust. Issues in terms of pay need to be balanced with the wider values of the NHS. There is a live discussion about what the right level of remuneration is to attract talent while not being out of step with the NHS values that both sides of the House recognise. I turn now to my right hon. Friend’s point about the new hospital site and capital investment in the STP area. He will be aware that the same STP currently has a significant new build proposal at Harlow. My right hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Robert Halfon) is assiduous in championing that proposal, and I met with the chief executive of that trust—

Sir Mike Penning: That is in Essex.

Stephen Barclay: It is in the same STP area.

Sir Mike Penning: My constituents will not know what STPs are. At the end of the day, the new site is in Essex, on the east Hertfordshire border, which is nowhere near my constituency. There is no tangible benefit when the debate is about a new hospital in west Hertfordshire.

Stephen Barclay: I beg to differ from my right hon. Friend on that, because this gets to the crux of the issue. The NHS must evolve. It has to move with technology and with the skills mix. Alongside the significant funding injection that the Prime Minister announced at the Royal Free Hospital, the NHS must also deliver productivity. At the specialist level, such as oncology or neuroscience, we often have populations of 3 million that need to be treated. Look at the footprint of the Christie NHS Foundation Trust, for example.

If we look at the other end, we need to deliver more care in the home and not have acute trusts soaking up so much investment. We need dynamic reconfigurations without acute trusts being the sole focus of our attention. We need service changes but—this goes to the core of my right hon. Friend’s remarks—they must be taken forward with clinical leadership and in a way that delivers trust.

I am happy to continue to engage with my right hon. Friend’s specific allegations on a case-by-case basis.

Dr Caroline Johnson: The Minister talks about dealing with things on a case-by-case basis, so I wonder whether he will consider Grantham’s A&E, which has had to close overnight for nearly two years, to see what can be done to facilitate its reopening as soon as possible.

Stephen Barclay: Again, I am happy to consider that issue. I have been up to visit the United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust and have met the chief executive and the leadership team, so I am aware of the issues, which are partly due to geography. However, we are straying slightly away from Hemel Hempstead.

As I said, I am happy to engage with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead on his specific allegations. It is important that service changes are done at the local level with clinical leadership in a way that builds trust, and I will continue to engage with him in the weeks and months ahead.

Question put and agreed to.

6.18 pm

House adjourned.
**House of Commons**

*Wednesday 11 July 2018*

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

**PRAYERS**

[Mrs Speaker in the Chair]

**Oral Answers to Questions**

**SCOTLAND**

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

**Industrial Strategy**

1. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that Scotland benefits fully from the industrial strategy.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): The industrial strategy is a strategy for the whole UK and will bring significant opportunities for Scotland. We are working with businesses, universities and business groups across Scotland to seize those opportunities. In line with devolution, the Scottish Government, of course, hold many of the levers to boost and support the growth that we hope the strategy will bring.

**John Howell:** Earlier this year, the Secretary of State for International Trade launched a drive to attract more than £2 billion of investment into Scottish companies as part of the modern industrial strategy. Does my hon. Friend welcome the Government’s efforts to boost exports as part of the modern industrial strategy?

**Stuart Andrew:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that an important part of delivering this industrial strategy is the UK and Scottish Governments working collaboratively. My right hon. Friend the Business Secretary gave evidence to the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee in April, and he has also hosted a roundtable with the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, so a lot is going on.

**Lesley Laird** (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): As a football fan, I wish England good luck tonight in their semi-final. Although 1966 may have been a very good year, 1967 was even better.

In 1999 it was a Labour Secretary of State for Scotland who stood up for Scottish shipyards and ensured that the contract for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary was given to the shipyards in Govan. Roll forward to 2018 and the contract for the fleet solid support ships is out for tender. Analysis by the GMB shows a direct tax and national insurance benefit and return to the Treasury of £285 million, but so far, the current Conservative Secretary of State has refused to stand up for Scottish shipyards. I therefore ask him a very straightforward question: why not?

**Stuart Andrew:** As someone who was born in Wales, who now lives in England and whose father and family come from Scotland, I join the hon. Lady in wishing the English team every success today.

I do not accept the hon. Lady’s premise that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not fighting for shipbuilding in this country. Our warships, which are being built in the UK, are securing 4,000 jobs and 20 years of work on the Clyde, and the British industry is preparing to bid for a new Type 31 class. We want all British yards to take part in the latest applications for the new contracts, and we hope that they are successful.

**Lesley Laird:** I am disappointed that the Secretary of State did not reply for himself, which answers my question about why he is not standing up for Scotland.

Without the fleet solid support ships contract, Rosyth will be struggling for work and thousands will be worse off as a result. Labour’s Opposition day debate today will call on the Government to build these ships in the UK—build them here. The Government have a majority of 13, and there are 13 Scottish Tory MPs. Will this finally be the issue on which Scottish Tories stand up for Scotland? Will they and the Secretary of State back the motion, and will the Secretary of State encourage his other Westminster colleagues to do the same? Build them in Britain.

**Stuart Andrew:** Our Scottish Conservative MPs work day in, day out, not just for their constituencies, but for Scotland as a whole, and I am very proud of the work they do—they really are a formidable team. Last year, we unveiled an ambitious new national shipbuilding strategy, which met the challenge set by the independent Sir John Parker, who said:
"I am very impressed by the courage that the Secretary of State has shown—and the Government—in adopting my recommendations, which were very extensive".

That shows that we are behind the shipbuilding industry.

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018: Legislative Consent

2. Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the (a) Scottish Government and (b) Prime Minister on the Scottish Parliament’s decision not to grant a legislative consent motion for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. [906298]

9. Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the (a) Scottish Government and (b) Prime Minister on the Scottish Parliament’s decision not to grant a legislative consent motion for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. [906305]

10. Hannah Bardell (Livingston) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the (a) Scottish Government and (b) Prime Minister on the Scottish Parliament’s decision not to grant a legislative consent motion for the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. [906308]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): The Joint Ministerial Committee (European Negotiations) met last Thursday and the Prime Minister was fully briefed on the outcome.

Angela Crawley: After repeated exclusion from Brexit discussions, the Secretary of State was finally allowed a place at the table at Chequers last week. How did he use that time to speak up for Scotland? What representations did he make on behalf of the Scottish Parliament, given the majority vote to withhold legislative consent?

David Mundell: The hon. Lady is conflating a number of issues, but what I can confirm to her is, as I discussed with Mr Russell last Thursday, that the Scottish Government produced a very complete document with their views to be fed into that meeting of the Cabinet, and I fed them in.

Joanna Cherry: That was a bit of a disappointing answer, so may I probe a bit further? The Prime Minister’s Chequers agreement rides roughshod over the Scottish Parliament. Scotland’s economy is heavily reliant on services. Thousands of my constituents work in that sector, yet she is determined to make a deal in which services are taken out. Has the Secretary of State worked out the impact of the Prime Minister’s decision on the Scottish economy yet, and what is he going to do about it?

David Mundell: At the heart of the issue is a fact in the Scottish Government’s document that this Government could not accept—the Scottish National party Scottish Government do not want to leave the European Union. The Prime Minister is focused on leaving the EU on a basis that not only does the best for British business, but respects the outcome of a referendum across the whole of the UK.

Hannah Bardell: I hear that the Secretary of State has been going about boasting that he is the longest serving member of Cabinet in role, but it seems odd that being invisible and ineffective has been rewarded. He has failed to represent and respect the democratic will of the Scottish Parliament. He has failed to speak up for Scotland in the Cabinet and failed to meet his promise to debate devolution in the Commons. When will he accept those failures and resign?

David Mundell: Goodness—the hon. Lady did not get a chance in the debate last week, so she just reheats the same old stuff. At the heart of this is the fact that the SNP does not accept and does not like the representations I make on behalf of Scotland, which are about keeping Scotland in the United Kingdom.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Over the past year, it has been a huge privilege to work closely with my right hon. Friend on this issue. Does he agree that the ludicrous theatrics of the nationalist party are a disservice to the people of not only Scotland, but the whole United Kingdom, because of the detrimental effect they had on the passage of the EU withdrawal Act?

David Mundell: I commend my hon. Friend for his efforts as a Minister. He was one of the hardest working Ministers I have ever encountered, and I absolutely agree with what he said. Although there are people in this Chamber who have their differences on Brexit, the SNP is not interested in Brexit—Brexit has been weaponised purely to take forward the cause of independence and have another independence referendum.

Mr Alister Jack (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend reassure my constituents that the 2018 Act will not remove any of the Scottish Parliament’s current powers?

David Mundell: I can absolutely do that. We have heard repeatedly from the SNP about a power grab, but when Nicola Sturgeon reshuffled her Cabinet, she needed more Ministers because of the powers and responsibilities that the Scottish Government were taking on. Today, we learn that they have taken on additional office space in Glasgow for a bigger organisation because they are delivering existing priorities while embracing additional responsibilities.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): Scotland trades around four times as much with the rest of the United Kingdom as it does with the European Union. Does my right hon. Friend agree that our top priority must be to ensure that the internal UK market is protected as soon as we leave the European Union?

David Mundell: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. The UK internal market, which, as he says, is worth four times as much to Scotland as trade with the whole of the EU put together, may not be important to the Scottish National party, but it is important to businesses and for jobs in Scotland, and we will stand up to protect it.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): With regard to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act or any issue to do with the EU in this House, will the Secretary of State...
tell us how many times Ruth Davidson, the Scottish Conservative leader, has demanded that he or any of the 13 Scottish Conservative MPs vote against the Government line?

David Mundell: Ruth Davidson makes a very clear statement of her position on European issues and contributes fully to the debate. Government Members want to achieve a good deal for Scotland and the UK as we leave the EU. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will bring himself to support that.

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): I am keen to get some clarity on the Secretary of State’s discussions with the Scottish Government and the debate at Chequers last Friday. Given that the Chequers agreement talks about a free trade area and a common rulebook, and therefore impacts directly on the areas that were discussed in respect of joint arrangements after Brexit, will he confirm that the content of that agreement was discussed with the Scottish Government in advance?

David Mundell: This comes back to the same question that the hon. Gentleman asks on each occasion. He cannot accept that Scotland has two Parliaments and two Governments.

Tommy Sheppard: I will take that as a no, then, which is beyond disappointing. The Secretary of State continues his disrespect for devolution. Given that the Government are changing their entire direction with respect to this matter, will he commit today to consulting the Scottish Government and coming to an agreement with them on how to administer things in Scotland after Brexit?

David Mundell: I am very keen and willing to work with the Scottish Government. As I said, the Scottish Government set out a helpful summary of their position, which we discussed with Mr Russell last week. I then set out the Scottish Government’s concerns and issues during the Cabinet meeting. After that Cabinet meeting, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and people from the Prime Minister’s office updated the Scottish Government on the Chequers summit.

Mr Speaker: We need to make faster progress; it is far too slow.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I feel that I ought to congratulate the Secretary of State on achieving a new milestone as the longest-serving member in one role in the Prime Minister’s Cabinet, but I fear that may be by virtue of his invisibility, rather than his invincibility. As we have just heard, the Secretary of State is failing to stand up for Scotland’s interests when it comes to shipbuilding, and he and his 12 Scottish Tory colleagues have failed to stand up for Scotland’s devolution settlement. Will he use the influence that he should have developed over the past few years and condemn his Government’s handling of the devolution settlement, thereby demonstrating that he is not just Scotland’s invisible man in the Cabinet?

David Mundell: What I condemn is the once proud Unionist Scottish Labour party repeatedly voting with the SNP in Holyrood. I am afraid they have become just Nicola’s little helpers.

Leaving the EU: Fishing

3. Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): What assessment he has made of the opportunities for the Scottish fishing industry after the UK leaves the EU.

7. David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): What assessment he has made of the opportunities for the Scottish fishing industry after the UK leaves the EU.

13. Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): What assessment he has made of the opportunities for the Scottish fishing industry after the UK leaves the EU.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): I am proud to say that this Conservative Government are unequivocally taking Scotland’s fishermen out of the hated common fisheries policy. Just last week, the UK Government published their fisheries White Paper, which sets out that as an independent coastal state, we will at long last regain control of our waters.

Douglas Ross: Does the Secretary of State know whether the Scottish Government are supporting the central aims of that fisheries White Paper—namely that we leave the CFP; that we decide who catches what, where and when; that we manage the expansion of our industry in a sustainable way; and that we are not blackmailed by Brussels for our market—or does the SNP want to keep us in the hated CFP?

Mr Speaker: Hopelessly long. I have already said that we need to speed up. The trouble is that people have these pre-prepared, scripted questions—[Interruption.] Well, the hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) has learned it, and we are grateful to him.

David Mundell: Sadly, the Scottish Government’s position remains exactly as it has been throughout: to take Scotland back into the CFP.

David Duguid: Last week’s publication of the fisheries White Paper was a hugely welcome step for an industry that is looking to capitalise on the benefits of leaving the EU. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, during the exit negotiations with the EU, this Government will keep the issues of access to British waters for EU vessels and access to the EU market for British fish separate, as they must not be conflated?

David Mundell: Yes, we will.

Mr Speaker: Absolutely marvellous.

Chris Green: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it will take many years to build the Scottish fishing fleet back up to full strength, but that that would never happen if the SNP got its way and kept us in the common fisheries policy?

David Mundell: Absolutely, and we can see that in the response of the fishing industry. This Government are right behind the fishing industry in taking advantage of what it sees as a sea of opportunity.
11. [906309] Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): Fifty per cent. of the fish processing industry relies on an EU workforce. What protection has the Secretary of State negotiated within the Cabinet to secure their future post-Brexit?

David Mundell: The right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) has secured a very apposite debate on that matter this evening. I am very conscious of this issue, and I will be meeting the Home Secretary next week.

12. [906310] John McNally (Falkirk) (SNP): The White Paper refers to the seafood trade as “vital” but, as with EU workers, no information is given about how it will be protected. This will be of concern to the live shellfish industry in Orkney and Shetland, which enjoys a frictionless customs passage in the EU at the moment. Will the Secretary of State guarantee that that frictionless passage will continue?

David Mundell: I am very conscious of the issues around not just catching and processing fish, but the markets, and those will be at the forefront of our thinking as we take forward leaving the EU.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend tell me what benefits there will be from leaving the common fisheries policies for the whole of the United Kingdom?

David Mundell: Mr Speaker, you have asked me to be brief, so I will refer my hon. Friend to the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation document “Sea of Opportunity”.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I do not know what the Secretary of State plans to be doing at 7 o’clock this evening, but I shall be here, along with the Immigration Minister, for the end-of-day Adjournment debate on the subject of visas for non-EEA nationals in the fishing industry. If he could fix that and get the industry the labour that it needs between now and 7 pm, we could both probably think of something else to be doing.

David Mundell: I am afraid that I cannot meet the right hon. Gentleman’s timescale but, like him and others, I wish England well in their game this evening. On the substantive issue that he raises, I would be very happy to speak to him directly ahead of my meeting with the Home Secretary.

Connectivity

4. John Lamont (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support connectivity between Scotland and the rest of the UK. [906300]

5. Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): What steps the Government are taking to support connectivity between Scotland and the rest of the UK. [906301]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Stuart Andrew): Scotland’s trade with the rest of the UK is, as we heard a moment ago, four times that with the EU, so good connectivity is vital to our shared prosperity. The recent vote on Heathrow was critical. Maintaining and enhancing routes to Scotland will bring key benefits, and more frequent and new routes will be served to help to improve connectivity.

John Lamont: Many businesses in my constituency depend on customers and staff from south of the border, so what discussions has the Minister had with the Scottish Government about improving cross-border links on the A1, A68 and A7, and, crucially, the extension of the Borders Railway to Carlisle?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right that cross-border connectivity is crucial right across the United Kingdom. He and his constituents will quite rightly expect the UK Government to commit to working closely and constructively with the Scottish Government so that we have a joined-up approach. We are working on a day-to-day level, and at an official level between the Department for Transport and Transport Scotland. As for long-term projects, the potential of the borderlands growth deal could stand to be transformative for his constituents.

Paul Masterton: Does my hon. Friend agree with the managing director of Glasgow airport, Derek Provan, who said that additional flights resulting from a third runway at Heathrow are “imperative for Scottish business”, and can he guarantee that a good proportion of those additional flights will go from Glasgow?

Stuart Andrew: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and so is the MD of Glasgow airport. The third runway is imperative for Scottish businesses, which is why we have set very clear expectations that 15% of the slots that are made available will be for domestic flights. It is disappointing that the Scottish National party did not vote for this expansion. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: I understand the sense of anticipation and excitement in the Chamber, but it seems very unfair on the hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) that his question was not fully heard, and that we could not properly hear the mellifluous tones of a very courteous Minister. If there could be greater attentiveness to these important matters, it would be a great advance.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm his support for local councils, including my own of East Lothian, in their application for wave 3 funding for broadband roll-out from this Government?

Stuart Andrew: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman specific confirmation at this point, but I would be more than happy to write to him, if he would allow me to.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the Minister share the concern in Scotland that, although the third runway for Heathrow might be helpful to the south-east of England, the effect on the Scottish climate of those extra flights—rather than direct flights or improved rail services—could actually be damaging?

Stuart Andrew: As the hon. Lady is probably aware, when we made the announcement and had the vote, we made a commitment to having a strong environmental plan. We will be looking at that very seriously.
The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): May I first welcome my right hon. and learned Friend to his role as Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, and thank his predecessor for his energy and the interest that he showed in Scotland? I have regular discussions with Cabinet colleagues regarding a wide range of issues relating to Scotland and look forward to working closely with the new Secretary of State on this issue.

Jamie Stone: The Secretary of State will be aware that mobile reception in my constituency is variable, to say the very least. The Home Office has given a company called EE a large amount of money to install infrastructure. Will the Secretary of State help other providers to access this infrastructure?

David Mundell: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue for rural Scotland; it is also very important in my own Dumfriesshire, Clydesdale and Tweeddale constituency. I will give him that undertaking.

Kirstene Hair: The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport warned that Scotland was due to miss its target of superfast broadband. Does the Secretary of State for Scotland agree that the SNP is letting down rural areas such as my constituency of Angus?

David Mundell: My hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for improved broadband in rural Scotland. Indeed, she is correct that the Scottish Government have let Scotland down on this issue.

Pete Wishart: According to thinkbroadband, 93.4% of premises in Scotland now have access to superfast broadband, which compares with 95% in the UK. This has been done with some of the most challenging geography in the whole of Europe, with some £580 million of Scottish Government money being put into the last 5%. Will the Secretary of State now congratulate the Scottish Government on achieving this and thank them for investing in a reserved area, which is his responsibility?

David Mundell: Rather than reading out Scottish Government press releases, the hon. Gentleman should be standing up for his constituents and people across rural Scotland who get a poor deal on broadband, which is primarily due to the ineffectiveness of the Scottish Government.

Devolution

8. Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent discussions he has had with the Scottish Government on the devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (David Mundell): My ministerial colleagues and I frequently meet the Scottish Government to discuss a range of issues relating to the implementation of the Scotland Act 2016. Only last week, I gave my agreement to a section 104 order for the delivery of welfare benefits. This makes changes to UK legislation so that the Scottish Government can take on Executive responsibility for carer’s allowance.

Gavin Newlands: I am sure that they are very grateful for that. The Secretary of State has said: “The UK Government will continue working closely with the Scottish Government and other devolved administrations to develop a fishing policy that works for the whole of the UK.” In reality, they were shown a copy of the White Paper with no consultation. Will he please define “working closely”?

David Mundell: My definition of “working closely” is that, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and I met Fergus Ewing, the Minister responsible for fishing, at the highland show, it was very cordial.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): As most people in the House know, the Smith commission will have the cross-party commitment to have more devolution from Edinburgh to local authorities, and not to centralise power. What discussions has my right hon. Friend had with the devolved Administration to ensure that that happens?

David Mundell: As my hon. Friend knows, these matters are devolved, but it is a matter of profound disappointment that, rather than devolving powers on which people in from non-EEA countries such as, in particular, Ghana and the Philippines, who are very valued in Scotland, will this Government get on with their job, stop the Brexit soap opera, lift the pin, get the men in, get the boats fishing, and get taxes being paid—and move now?

David Mundell: I have already advised the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael)—who, as the hon. Gentleman will have heard, is having a debate at 7 pm this evening; I am sure he will want to be there—that I take this issue very seriously. I am meeting the Home Secretary on it next week.

Dr Philippa Whitford (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): I do not think that meeting Fergus Ewing at the highland show can really count as consultation, so what formal consultation was carried out before the fishing White Paper was published?
David Mundell: As I think the hon. Lady will appreciate, the White Paper is itself a consultation, so let us hear her and the SNP’s views on fishing. But of course they do not really want to tell us, because their view is, “Take Scotland back into the common fisheries policy.”

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [906382] Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 11 July.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I have been asked to reply. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is attending the NATO summit in Brussels. I know that Members on both sides of this House would like to join me in paying tribute to Lord Carrington, who died on Monday. His was an extraordinary life of public service, including as Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary, and Secretary General of NATO.

I am sure, too, that all Members would also wish to commend the incredible efforts of the authorities in Thailand and the volunteers from the British Cave Rescue Council for their role in the successful rescue operation. We wish them, the boys and the coach who were rescued and their families well. I know that we would all wish also to offer our condolences to the family of the Thai diver, Saman Gunan, who sadly lost his life during the rescue operation.

Finally, I am sure that all Members, whichever part of the United Kingdom they come from, would join me in congratulating Gareth Southgate and the England team on their fantastic performance in the quarter-final on Saturday, and in wishing them the very best for this evening’s match against Croatia. I will happily buy the team on Saturday, and in wishing them the very best for this evening’s match against Croatia. I will happily buy the team a flag to help her to join in.

Chris Stephens: As someone who supports the principle of independence for England, I have no problem in supporting England tonight.

I thank the Minister for his role in helping to secure a public inquiry into contaminated blood. My constituent Cathy Young and many infected blood campaigners, however, remain concerned that the inquiry will be delayed, like Chilcot, by those who may have a case to answer through the Maxwellisation process. Does the Minister agree that truth and justice should not be delayed? Will he commit to the Government looking at the legislative changes to the Maxwellisation process?

Mr Lidington: This is of course a tragedy that has caused unimaginable hardship and pain for the people affected. Let me say straightforwardly that we recognise the hard work that the hon. Gentleman and others from all political parties here have put into campaigning on this issue.

In relation to the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, I am sure he will understand that whether or not the inquiry adopts a Maxwellisation process is a matter for the independent inquiry itself. It is, as the term suggests, independent of ministerial direction, but having talked to Sir Brian Langstaff directly, I know that he and his team are very mindful of the need for speed. Victims of infected blood continue to die, and I know that Sir Brian is determined to complete the inquiry’s work as quickly as a thorough examination of the facts allows. The Government are committed to ensuring that the inquiry has all the resources and everything else it needs to complete that task as rapidly as possible.

Q4. [906385] Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): As a proud Welshman and a proud Brit, I say, “Come on England!” Crime is on the increase in the Ribble Valley, including antisocial behaviour orders, but the response from the Labour police and crime commissioner is to close front desk services at police stations, including Clitheroe police station. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we do not better protect the public by degrading the service that they pay for?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is right to say that the accessibility of local officers is a vital principle of British policing. He will know that we have provided a strong and comprehensive settlement that is increasing total investment in the police system by more than £460 million in this financial year, and for Lancashire police specifically, we have provided more than £6 million for 2017-18. As he says, decisions about resources, including the use of police stations, are a matter for police and crime commissioners and chief constables, but I encourage those who make those decisions to listen to their local communities to best assess their needs.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), I should mention that we are very fortunate today to be joined in one of our Galleries by two members of the Osmond family, Jay and Merrill Osmond. It takes some of us back to the 1970s. We are very pleased to have you—well done.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): May I join the Minister in paying tribute to Lord Carrington, who served his country with such distinction in both the forces and in government and whose decision to resign the office of Foreign Secretary will be remembered as an act of great principle and honour?

I share the joy at the rescue of the boys in Thailand and salute the bravery and sacrifice of the diving teams, including the seven British divers.

On the question of tonight’s match, I am afraid that I am not going to be watching it. It will be the only game that I have missed, but I will be representing the Labour party at tonight’s memorial event for the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide—something very close to my heart, given my father’s role in trying to prevent it.

Let me wish Gareth Southgate and the England team the best of luck for this match and hopefully for the final on Sunday. I may know very little about football, but even I can see that England’s progress so far at the World cup shows what can be achieved when all the
individual players work effectively as a team, when there is a clear game plan, when they are all working together and, of course, when everyone respects and listens to the manager. Can I simply ask the Minister what lessons he thinks the England team could teach this shambles of a Government?

Mr Lidington: I think that the England team does teach some good lessons about the importance of having a clear plan which the leader, the team captain, has the full support of the squad in delivering. We will of course be publishing tomorrow full details of the United Kingdom plan for Brexit, which we will be putting to the British public and to our 27 European partners. When the right hon. Lady gets up again, perhaps she will tell us what the Labour party’s alternative plan is, for at the moment that is one of the best kept secrets in politics.

Emily Thornberry: I thank the Minister for that answer, but who does he think he is kidding? Even Donald Trump can see that the Government are in turmoil, and he has not even got to Britain yet.

May I ask the Minister once again the question I asked him at PMQs in December 2016, when he compared Labour’s shadow Cabinet to “Mutiny on the Bounty” remade by the “Carry On” team. By those standards, what would he describe his lot now as—perhaps “Reservoir Dogs” remade by the Chuckle Brothers? But let me take him back to our first PMQs in 2016, when I asked him how it was possible to retain frictionless trade with Europe without remaining in a customs union. I got no answer then. Let me try again today. Can he explain how frictionless trade is going to be achieved under this Government’s Chequers plan?

Mr Lidington: The right hon. Lady will see the detail in the White Paper but, if she had been listening to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on Monday, she would have heard the Prime Minister explain very clearly in the White Paper when it is published tomorrow. The reason we are proposing, and I advise her to look at the White Paper, is that we believe a combination of the common rulebook that would have heard the Prime Minister explain very clearly on Monday, not just the UK, but every EU member state will have to apply the correct tariff to imports, depending if they are destined for the UK or the EU, or where finished goods are involved and therefore it is easy to identify the final destination, we will find that 96% of UK goods trade is going to pay either the correct or no tariff at all at the border.

Emily Thornberry: The Minister has, I believe, said something quite interesting, and I do hope that his Back Benchers are listening very carefully. He says that the Chequers free trade proposal will require no new technology and will involve no tracking of goods, but how can that be possible if there is no divergence on tariffs and no divergence on regulation—in other words, on trade in goods we will continue exactly as we are at present?

Mr Lidington: I am afraid the right hon. Lady might not have sat through all the Prime Minister’s statement and responses to questions on Monday, but my right hon. Friend made it very clear that we are actively looking in these new circumstances—frankly, we would, as a sensible Government, be looking anyway—at the opportunities that new technology offers, and will offer in the future, to minimise friction on trade for businesses of all kinds.

Emily Thornberry: The Minister cannot answer these simple questions of detail because he cannot admit the truth. The truth is that the Chequers proposal is total delusion. The UK cannot set its own tariffs on goods and keep frictionless trade with the EU. The technology to do so does not exist. There will be no divergence on tariffs in a free-trade area and no divergence on regulation. It is a customs union in all but name, but it does not cover our service industries, because—the Government claim—that is the great area of potential to negotiate trade agreements with the rest of the world. Can I ask the Minister to explain why a country such as China would agree to import more of our services if we cannot agree, in turn, to lower tariffs on its goods?

Mr Lidington: First, I think that the right hon. Lady still misunderstands the customs arrangements that we are proposing, and I advise her to look at the White Paper when it is published tomorrow. The reason we are proposing to treat services differently is that it is in services that regulatory flexibility matters most for both current and future trading opportunities. Although the EU acquis on goods has been stable for about 30 years, the EU acquis on services has not been, and the risk of unwelcome EU measures coming into play through the acquis on services is much greater.

Emily Thornberry: Well, I have asked the Minister why China would accept such a one-way deal on services, and the answer is that it would not. It is simply another Chequers delusion—a Brexit dream with no grip on reality. There is an easy answer to this mess: an alternative that will offer all the benefits of the Chequers free trade area with no new technology, no cost and no delay;
an alternative that both this House and Europe will accept; and an alternative covering both goods and services. Can I appeal to the Minister to accept that alternative, do what I urged him to do two years ago, and, instead of trying to negotiate some half-baked, back-door version of the customs union, get on with negotiating the real thing?

Mr Lidington: Again, the right hon. Lady keeps silent about what the Labour party is proposing. The truth is—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to hear the reply of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. I say, in the most genial spirit possible, to the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) that she is allowing her blood pressure to rise unduly. I say in a humanitarian spirit, Lincoln (Karen Lee) that she is allowing her blood pressure to rise unduly. I say , in the...
States of America will regrettably have the red carpet rolled out for him by this Conservative Government, but from the public, the welcome will be far from warm. With protests planned across Scotland and the United Kingdom against President Trump’s abhorrent policies and dangerous rhetoric, will the Minister follow the SNP’s lead and challenge President Trump on his abysmal record on human rights, his repugnant attitude towards women and his disgusting treatment of minorities, or does the Minister think that he will simply follow the Prime Minister’s lead and join the President hand in hand?

Mr Lidington: I disagree with the right hon. Gentleman. This country’s relationship with the United States of America is probably the closest between any two democracies in the west. It has lasted through Democrat and Republican presidencies alike and through Labour and Conservative premnships on this side of the Atlantic. Because of the security co-operation that we have with the United States, UK citizens are alive today who might well not be alive had that co-operation and information and intelligence sharing not taken place. It is therefore right that we welcome the duly elected President of our closest ally, as we shall do tomorrow.

Q7. [906388] Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): There are growing concerns in my constituency about the proposed changes to planning powers for fracking applications being put forward for consultation by the Government and specifically the idea of treating non-fracking shale exploration as permitted development. Will my right hon. Friend agree on when the consultation will be open, and does he agree that these kinds of planning application must come forward on the basis of local authority consent?

Mr Lidington: As my hon. Friend knows, shale gas has the potential to boost economic growth and support thousands of jobs across a number of sectors, as well as adding to this country’s energy security. The Government have outlined how we believe shale gas planning decisions should be made quickly and fairly to all involved. We are committed to consulting on further shale gas planning measures. Those consultations are planned to open over the summer, and I reassure him that these decisions will always be made in a way that ensures that shale use can happen safely, respecting local communities and safeguarding the environment.

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): The artificial pancreas, which is championed by the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, has the potential to transform the lives of those with type 1 diabetes. Will the right hon. Gentleman agree to look at ways to increase access to diabetes technology, including the artificial pancreas and continuous glucose monitoring, so that everyone with type 1 diabetes will have access to the best available technology?

Mr Lidington: First, I recognise the work that the right hon. Gentleman personally has put into campaigning on this issue. I am also aware of his personal experience of the devastating impact that this condition can have on families. I reassure him that the Government are committed to promoting the best possible care and treatment for people with diabetes as a priority. The National Institute for Health Research biomedical research centre in Cambridge is pioneering the development and use of the artificial pancreas, and the prototype system is now being tested by people in their own homes. I understand that the NIHR infrastructure supported more than 100 new studies and recruited almost 38,000 patients to help with those studies. That work is ongoing to test the efficacy of the artificial pancreas, and I shall certainly draw the right hon. Gentleman’s comments and campaign on this issue to the attention of the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Q10. [906391] Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): While we enjoy the summer weather, it does, of course, present challenges to our farming community. Will my right hon. Friend join the National Farmers Union and me in calling for people not to use sky lanterns, preferably ever, but certainly not during such a tinder-dry harvest? Our food producers deserve our support.

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend raises an important issue. First, I am sure we would all want to salute the incredible work that firefighters, the military and other partner agencies have done in responding to the wildfires we have seen in various parts of the country in the past couple of weeks. I encourage all organisers of summer events to exercise caution in this hot climate, to follow Home Office guidance on outdoor fire safety and to take steps to prevent the risk of fire from lanterns and fireworks, and to think about both the fire risk and the impact that debris from lanterns has too often had on farmers’ livestock.

Q3. [906384] Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): Since the collapse of Carillion six months ago, the new Royal Liverpool Hospital has stood unfinished and empty—a monument to corporate greed. Hospitals are for treating the sick, not lining the pockets of investors, so instead of waiting for commercial lawyers and accountants, holding secret meetings with no public accountability, will the Government now call in this contract, buy out the investors and deliver a publicly owned, publicly run hospital for the people of Liverpool?

Mr Lidington: First, I want to reassure the hon. Gentleman that we are absolutely committed to getting the Royal Liverpool Hospital built as rapidly as possible and to securing best value for money in doing so, and we are supporting the Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust in that work, but I do not think that what he advocates, which is to buy out the interests of the banks that have lent money to this project, is the right approach. It would encourage irresponsible lending against the prospect of a Government bail-out down the line. It is important that risk be seen to lie with the banks and the lenders and not be underwritten by the taxpayer. We are working actively with the trust and the existing private sector funders to find a way forward for them to complete the remaining work on the hospital, and we hope that this work will conclude in the very near future.

Mr Speaker: I have known the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington) for more than 30 years, so I fully understand that the comprehensiveness of his replies reflects his past distinction as a noted academic, but I gently make the point that I am determined to get through the questions on the Order Paper.
Q12. [906393] Alberto Costa (South Leicestershire) (Con): Given the NATO summit this week and the range of threats that this nation faces, including the appalling use of nerve agents on British soil, will my right hon. Friend reassure me and my constituents that the Government will continue to see NATO as the bedrock of Britain’s defence?

Mr Lidington: First, as far as this Government are concerned, NATO is, and will remain, the bedrock of our collective security, and certainly the threat posed by Russia will be one of the subjects that the Prime Minister and other leaders will be discussing at the summit in Brussels. I reflect with regret on the fact that the Leader of the Opposition has said on the record that he wishes that we were not part of NATO. The use of nerve agents in this country is appalling and impossible to excuse. The police continue to investigate what happened and how the attack was caused. The Government are fully committed to supporting the region and its residents and have announced new financial help to Salisbury and the surrounding area today.

Q6. [906387] Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): Until she was raped at the age of 18, my constituent led a healthy and happy life. Since then she has suffered severe post-traumatic stress disorder, seizures and blackouts, panic attacks, anxiety and depression, and is heavily reliant on her mother’s care. The Department for Work and Pensions has refused to award her an enhanced rate of personal independence payment on the basis that when she presented herself for her assessment, she was not demonstrating those particular symptoms. As a result, her mother is unable to claim income support and carers allowance, which is placing financial hardship on top of severe emotional distress.

May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to arrange a meeting for me with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions? What my constituent has experienced is, I am afraid, another example of what we see week in, week out in our surgeries: the cruel and inhumane consequences of this Government’s welfare policies.

Mr Lidington: I know that the hon. Gentleman has campaigned on the issue of DIPG for some time. I think the whole House will want to offer sympathy—which I certainly share—to his constituent and to anyone affected by that appalling condition. I will certainly draw the points that he has made to the attention of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and I am sure that a meeting will be arranged for him with either the Secretary of State or one of her Ministers.

Mr Lidington: I commend my right hon. Friend for the work that she continues to do, through the all-party parliamentary group on autism, to lead the campaign for better, more effective care and support for people with autistic spectrum disorders. I think that the changes in the special educational needs and disability system that were introduced four years ago have enabled us to join up state-provided services more effectively than in the past, but I am more than happy to welcome the new app and any other new technologies that will help people with autistic spectrum disorder.

Q8. [906389] Darren Jones (Bristol North West) (Lab): The Information Commissioner has fined Facebook for its involvement in the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and the Electoral Commission has concluded that the leave campaign broke electoral law. Is now not the time to set up a judge-led inquiry into the Brexit referendum? If the British people have been duped by Brexit shysters, they deserve to know about it.

Mr Lidington: The Information Commissioner’s report has only just been published, and the Government want to consider its recommendations in detail before responding. However, I think that the hon. Gentleman’s point focused on the possible commission of criminal offences. We are in a country in which, rightly, it is not for Ministers either to initiate or to stop criminal investigations or potential prosecutions. When there is evidence, it should be drawn to the attention of the police and the prosecuting authorities, and then let the law take its course.

Q14. [906395] Julia Lopez (Hornchurch and Upminster) (Con): I do not consider myself to be a Brexiteer, but two years ago, when asked to make a choice about the future direction of the country that I love, I voted to leave the European Union, knowing that that would be difficult but believing that our nation could make it work. I was not alone, and I have now been joined by those who voted remain and wish to respect our democracy. Does my right hon. Friend agree that across our continent people are feeling dangerously ignored, and that if democracy is to mean what we all thought it did, tomorrow’s White Paper will show that we in Britain, at least, will not deny the instruction that our people have given us?

Mr Lidington: My hon. Friend is right. I think that those of us who campaigned on the remain side need to respect the decision that the people of the country took, and to ponder the damage that would be done to what is already fragile confidence in our democratic institutions were that verdict to be ignored. I am confident that when my hon. Friend reads the White Paper tomorrow, she will see that we have a vision for a future relationship that will meet the vote that the people delivered.

Q9. [906390] Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): I am sure that the Minister will want to join me in thanking hospices across the country for the fantastic work they do supporting the terminally ill and their families, and especially the Pendleside Hospice, which supports my constituents, but is he aware that over the last eight years average Government grants have been cut from 32% to 20%, and that as these charities are outside the “Agenda for Change”, they are not eligible to apply for
funding to cover the NHS pay award? Will he today give a commitment that the Government do value the work of hospices and will he step in to get some extra funding to cover this award?

Mr Lidington: I am very happy to pay tribute to the work done at the Pendleside Hospice and hospices around the country. It is important that we see hospices as a very important element on a spectrum of palliative care and care at the end of life, which takes place sometimes in a hospice setting and sometimes in other settings. My right hon. Friend the Health Secretary will of course now be considering with the NHS leadership how to deliver on the ambitious long-term funding arrangement that the Government recently announced, and I am sure he will bear the hon. Lady’s comments in mind.

Q15. [906396] Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): Cornwall gets back some of our money from the EU in regional aid. Much of that money was, and is, used to invest in agrifood, in which I believe Cornwall is a world leader. How will this investment be able to continue without falling foul of state aid rules in this sector when the Government have said there will be a common rulebook?

Mr Lidington: I confirm that any investment that is legally able to be made within state aid rules now would be able to continue in the future, and any United Kingdom funding for money currently received as EU regional aid would comply with those same state aid rules going forward.

Q11. [906392] Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Members of my family were either killed or badly injured working in the coalmines of the South Wales valleys. We owe all of our miners a debt of gratitude, yet in recent years the Treasury has raked in billions of pounds from their pensions, so will the Chancellor meet me, retired miners and coalfield community MPs to fix this injustice?

Mr Lidington: We certainly recognise the hard work and incredible risks that miners took in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency and many others. The important thing about the miners’ pension scheme is that it should pay out all the promised benefits in full. My understanding is that the scheme is funded to do just that and that no former miner will lose out.

Amber Rudd (Hastings and Rye) (Con): The UK and the US have a uniquely strong relationship when it comes to security and intelligence services, the results of which regularly save lives not only in the UK but across Europe. May I ask that when our right hon. Friend the Prime Minister meets President Trump, she thank him for that relationship and the results of it, but might also take the opportunity to share with him the many instances that I know my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office knows about, where it is UK intelligence and UK security services that have saved lives in the US?

Mr Lidington: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct: the intelligence sharing and other security co-operation we have with the United States have saved lives in both countries, and it is vital to both our interests that those relationships continue.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): My constituents in Brighton are, sadly, used to chaos from Govia Thameslink Railway, but the last seven weeks have been a new level of rail hell. Since the GTR franchise is, effectively, run by the Department for Transport, will the right hon. Gentleman shake up the Government so that they finally take some action and show some leadership: action in restoring the Gatwick Express services at Preston Park, which have inexplicably been slashed, and leadership in getting rid of the hapless Transport Secretary? The Prime Minister has been reshuffling her Cabinet over the last week; will she reshuffle it a bit more and get that Transport Secretary replaced by—

Mr Speaker: Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Lidington: As regards GTR, improvements are simply not happening quickly enough, despite the assurances that the operators have given. We have launched a review of Govia Thameslink, which will report in the next few weeks. If those findings show that Govia is at fault, we will not hesitate to take action, whether through fines, restricting access to future franchises or stripping it of the franchise. Passengers deserve a far better service than they are getting at the moment, and we will hold those operators to account.

Mr Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Albania has one of the highest rates of honour killing in Europe. Will the Government look very closely at the case of Mrs Emiljana Muca, who was staying in the constituency of the hon. Member for Norwich South (Clive Lewis) and is now, thanks to the generosity of her therapist, staying in the therapist’s own house in south Norfolk to reduce the risk of self-harm? If she were to be deported to Albania, possibly as early as tomorrow, she might be the victim of an honour killing.

Mr Lidington: Obviously I do not know all the details of this case, but I am aware that this issue has brought together my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Norwich South and my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Norfolk (George Freeman). The Home Secretary or the Immigration Minister will be happy to meet the Members concerned to discuss the case.

Mr Speaker: I call Clive Lewis. [Interruption.] Well, that is a great self-denying ordinance on the part of the hon. Gentleman. He says that his question has been answered and that he is therefore satisfied. If that were a template for the House as a whole, just think of the possibilities!

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Will the Minister explain what the Prime Minister’s Brexit proposals would mean for those working for two of the largest employers in my constituency, Bentley Motors and the NHS?

Mr Lidington: It would be very good news for both of them. In particular, the automotive industry has been arguing for months that we need a deal that ensures frictionless trade with the EU27, and that is what the model we are proposing will deliver.
Neil O’Brien (Harborough) (Con): I strongly welcome the extra £20 billion and the long-term plan for the NHS, but does the First Minister agree that, at a time when local authority budgets are under pressure, it would be attractive to have more pooling of budgets between health and social care?

Mr Lidington: It is important that the national health service and local authorities work closely together to ensure that community-based care, funded from whichever source, is effective and meets patients’ needs. I know that the new Health Secretary, like his predecessor, is determined to take that forward further.

Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Is the Minister aware that his Government have already taken more than £3.5 billion out of the miners’ pension? They are like Philip Green and Maxwell put together. Stop stealing the miners’ pension!

Mr Lidington: The benefits due from the pension scheme to all former miners have, as I understand it, been paid in full and continue to be paid in full, and the scheme is fully funded to meet those commitments into the future.
The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement on Afghanistan. The United Kingdom will never forget the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the thousands of innocent women, men and children killed in the atrocity. That barbaric violence prompted the UK, alongside our NATO allies, to enter Afghanistan to ensure that terrorists could not use it as a base from which to attack our citizens at home or abroad.

Before I continue, I want to pay tribute to the efforts of the tens of thousands of brave British men and women who have served in Afghanistan for the past 16 years. We will never forget what they did, particularly those 456 brave men and women who paid the ultimate price and those who suffered life-changing injuries in the line of duty. Their service and sacrifice has not been in vain. As I saw when I visited back in March, not only do millions of ordinary Afghans now have access to clean water, vital medicine and education, which would not have seemed possible less than 20 years ago, not only have they enabled the Afghan people to take charge of their own security, and not only is the capability of the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces growing, but elections are giving a voice to the people of Afghanistan, who are increasingly calling for peace, which would have been unthinkable a short time ago.

Our commitment to Afghanistan remains an enduring one. Although UK combat operations ended in 2014, our troops are playing a key role in NATO’s Resolute Support mission by leading the Kabul security force. They are performing a vital role in training, advising and assisting the Afghan national army and air force and developing the nationwide security structures that will strengthen Afghanistan’s democracy. They have a quick reaction force that works alongside the Afghan army to provide urgent help in Kabul if and when required. They also continue to work alongside their Afghan, Australian, New Zealand and Danish partners to mentor staff at the army officer academy. Since opening in 2013, the academy has held 11 graduations, and more than 3,000 high-quality officers have passed out of that great institution, which is modelled on our Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. They are making a genuine difference in helping the Afghan National Defence and Security Forces to maintain security and keep its citizens safe.

The momentum is with the Afghan forces, and the Taliban cannot win militarily. Ultimately, Afghanistan’s only chance for a better long-term future is through an Afghan-led peaceful negotiation, and significant progress is already being made. The UK welcomes the Government of Afghanistan’s offer to start a discussion on a political process with the Taliban, supported by the recent ceasefire. It is encouraging to see bilateral relations with Pakistan improving, which will help to build wider stability in the region. Critically, parliamentary and presidential elections are to be held over the coming 12 months, giving ordinary people the chance to shape their nation’s destiny very much for the better.

However, despite the growing confidence of the Afghan forces, atrocities such as the appalling attack against the Intercontinental Hotel at the start of the year, which killed 42 people, demonstrate that the insurgency has proven resilient. It still controls parts of Afghanistan and continues to conduct brutal suicide attacks, killing innocent people. Of equal concern is the fact that terrorist groups such as Daesh are seeking a foothold in the region in order to conduct operations against Britain and other nations. Given the upcoming elections and efforts by the Afghan Government to reach a political settlement, NATO has recognised that now is a critical time to give extra support.

So, in response to a NATO request and in recognition of the professionalism and competence of our armed forces, I can announce today that we will increase the number of troops to support our existing mission, sending an additional 440 personnel in non-combat roles to take the total UK contribution to around 1,100 personnel. That will make the UK the third largest troop contributor to the NATO operation. Around half of the 440 additional personnel will deploy in August, and the remainder will follow no later than February next year. The additional soldiers will initially deploy from the Welsh Guards, which already provides the UK’s contribution to the Kabul security force.

Today’s decision underlines our commitment to the people of Afghanistan. It will help to strengthen the institutions that preserve Kabul’s security and enable the Afghan-led peace process to develop. It will also send a signal to the Taliban that we will not abandon this proud nation and that they cannot simply outwait our departure. It also shows our commitment to NATO, which must remain the cornerstone of our defence in a darker more unpredictable world. Above all, however, it reiterates Britain’s commitment to strengthen the security of our nation. History teaches us that the prize of a more secure Afghanistan is peace and security for all. I commend this statement to the House.

12.55 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for advance sight of it and join him in paying tribute to all the servicemen and women who have served and are serving in Afghanistan. We remember the 456 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice there and those who continue to live with injuries sustained during the conflict. We commend the courage shown by our Afghan partners who work under the constant threat posed by insurgents.

As alliance leaders gather in Brussels today, we reaffirm our commitment to NATO and to the range of operations that it supports around the world. The UK has always played its full part in contributing to NATO missions, and we currently have personnel deployed in Kosovo and in Somalia, as well as on the Resolute Support mission. It is right that the skills and professionalism of our armed forces can be used to benefit our partners in Afghanistan by training Afghan forces to the same high standards.

May I ask the Secretary of State for some further detail on today’s announcement? Will he outline the planned timetable for our troops to remain in Afghanistan? Our armed forces have a range of technical skills, so will he say more about the specific work that they will be undertaking? Will the training offered to our Afghan partners focus on specialist activities or continue to be more general? As the Secretary of State will be aware,
there has been some recent concern about the eligibility rules for operational allowances, so will he confirm that troops will continue to receive the allowance for their work in Afghanistan? The Resolute Support mission currently comprises some 16,000 personnel from 39 NATO member states and partners, so will the Secretary of State set out what discussions he has had with NATO allies about upping their commitment to the mission?

The work of the armed forces in Afghanistan must of course form part of a wider strategy to promote good governance there, so what discussions has the Secretary of State had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office about how it and the Ministry of Defence can support one another? We welcome the U-turn in Government policy on locally employed staff, such as interpreters or drivers, whose work in Afghanistan has been vital to the UK and NATO’s efforts in the country, so will he update the House on the progress that his Department has made on that issue?

Members across the House support the important work of our personnel in Afghanistan, recognising it as part of the process towards reaching a lasting peace settlement, but we must also be clear that the work is quite distinct from the combat operations that ended in 2014. So, finally, will the Secretary of State confirm that the additional troops will be there for training, not in a combat role?

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**Gavin Williamson:** The hon. Lady raises several important points. We want to be in Afghanistan to ensure that we get the right outcomes for the peace process, and it is not possible to put a date on when that will be concluded. However, we continue to work closely with all our allies in the NATO coalition and, most importantly, with the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan to try to promote the peace process and bring it forward as rapidly as possible. Work will be undertaken with the Kabul security force, which we have been leading. There is a rapid reaction force element that will support Afghan forces if there are incidents. We have a force there, but it is very much there to support Afghan forces.

All personnel will be in receipt of operational allowance, which is important when we ask service personnel to put themselves in harm’s way. They do such an important and valuable job. I re-emphasise that our work not just with the FCO but with the Department for International Development and other organisations across the international sphere is pivotal in bringing a peaceful resolution to Afghanistan.

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**Dr Julian Lewis** (New Forest East) (Con): I understand that this deployment sends a very strong signal, as my right hon. Friend put it, to the Taliban that they will not be allowed to win, but does it send a sufficiently strong signal to the Treasury—an even more formidable opponent—that an uplift in the defence budget towards 2.5%, and eventually 3%, of GDP is necessary to fund our global role adequately?

**Gavin Williamson:** We are very much focusing on the Taliban with this announcement, which goes to show how Britain can make a difference in the world. We talk about global Britain, and this is a brilliant personification of how we can make a difference in different nations. It is to our armed forces that our nation so often turns. Whether in dealing with the recent difficulties in Salisbury or in Afghanistan, it is our armed forces that have the capabilities, the knowledge and the ability to deliver consistently for this nation.

**Stewart Malcolm McDonald** (Glasgow South) (SNP): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. I associate myself with his comments on the personnel and, of course, I extend our thoughts to their families, who I am sure will be having a tough time following this announcement.

May I press the Secretary of State slightly on the timetable? I am not looking for a date or a specific length of time for how long he thinks this increase will last but, in general, does he view this as a long-term or a short-term increase?

May we also have regular updates on Afghanistan? Afghanistan is one area of the world on which attention has perhaps fallen back. We regularly have updates in the Chamber on Syria, which is extremely helpful, and such updates might help us with Afghanistan, too.

The online community through which Daesh spreads its poison is clearly a massive problem. Can the Secretary of State give us any indication as to whether the training and resources going to Afghanistan will be used to seek to tackle Daesh’s online presence to prevent its poison from spreading and gaining the foothold that none of us wants to see?

Finally, on the political process and the offer of talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban, can the Secretary of State lay out, in general terms, how hopeful he is that those talks will be successful? Where are we in the political process right now?

**Gavin Williamson:** A number of those questions almost interrelate, especially the hon. Gentleman’s first and last questions. We will not prejudge the timetable, and we will continue working with other NATO allies. We constantly review our force structure not just in Afghanistan but in Operation Shader in Iraq and Syria. We will be constantly reviewing this, and we will be trying to encourage other allies to continue contributing. We have already had discussions with other partners. There will be a conditions-based approach to how long our forces remain there, but in my discussions with the Afghan Government, and in the previous Foreign Secretary’s discussions, there has been a real willingness and eagerness to try to sit around the table.

This was the first time we have ever seen a ceasefire during Ramadan, and it was a very short ceasefire, but it was a chink of light, and it showed that progress can be made. It is important not just for Great Britain but for other nations to support the Afghan Government at this critical time in seizing the opportunity for peace.

**Sir Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks) (Con): Although the increase in non-combat support is welcome, and the sacrifice of our own troops there should never be forgotten, should we not also acknowledge the massively greater contribution of the United States to the support of that very fragile democracy, and put on record this week our thanks to President Trump for the increase in United States troop numbers and missions, which help the operations in Afghanistan that help to keep us safe from the threat of transnational terrorism?
Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend makes a very important point about the role that the United States has played in doing so much to bring about and promote stability in Afghanistan, and to deal with terrorist threats that can manifest themselves at home. I put on record our appreciation not just for President Trump, but for US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and for General Nicholson, who has taken such an important and pivotal leadership role in dealing with the insurgency in Afghanistan over the past few years.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): In supporting the Defence Secretary's statement and the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), I urge the Defence Secretary to redouble his efforts to explain to the British public why we are doing what we are doing, and how it impacts on the security of our citizens in this country. There is a lot more to be done on that. I know that he is trying, but I urge him to redouble his efforts to explain it to the British people.

Gavin Williamson: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, because an unstable Afghanistan leads to threats here in Britain. We saw how the ungoverned spaces that developed in Iraq and Syria were used to promote terrorist attacks on the streets of Britain. We have to deal with that at source, and we will do everything we can to explain to the British people the threat that such an Afghanistan presents.

Tom Tugendhat (Tonbridge and Malling) (Con): Those of us who served in Afghanistan for many years saw the importance of the coalition of the willing, as it was then. Does my right hon. Friend agree that NATO has provided the fundamental underpinning of not just the security of Afghanistan, but our own security? As the summit starts in Brussels today, this is the moment to remember that the only time the article 5 guarantee has been invoked was when the United States was attacked on 9/11. We are therefore essentially reinforcing not just our own security, nor indeed just the security of the people of Afghanistan but, fundamentally, the security of the people of the United States.

Gavin Williamson: The NATO alliance has served every nation incredibly well, and my hon. Friend is right to point out the fact that article 5 has been invoked on only that one occasion following the 9/11 attacks. We must not underestimate the value or utility of NATO, and we must continue to invest in its future to keep us all safe.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): As ever, we owe a debt of gratitude to our armed forces and their families who will be supporting them during this deployment. As the NATO summit continues, what efforts are being made to encourage our other NATO allies to increase their own commitments?

Gavin Williamson: As soon as I complete this statement, I will be going to Brussels to have numerous bilateral meetings with our many NATO allies. We need to hammer home the message that, for NATO to work, we all have to invest in it. We cannot expect one country to carry the burden all the time. We all have to show that willingness to invest. The Prime Minister will be sending that message, and the United States will also be sending that message. I think that the message is starting to get through.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for delaying his arrival at NATO to make this important announcement himself from the Dispatch Box. I believe this is the largest deployment he has authorised since becoming Defence Secretary.

I share with everybody in the Chamber a great respect for the Welsh Guards, in particular—they will be playing a significant role. Does my right hon. Friend recognise the role that UK aid has played over the past few years, particularly in the education and training of young women and teachers? Do not the role of UK aid and that of our services personnel complement each other in helping to make Afghanistan a more stable country?

Gavin Williamson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right, because an unstable Afghanistan leads to threats here in Britain. We saw how the ungoverned spaces that developed in Iraq and Syria were used to promote terrorist attacks on the streets of Britain. We have to deal with that at source, and we will do everything we can to explain to the British people the threat that such an Afghanistan presents.

As the Secretary of State said, we will have 1,100 service personnel deployed in Afghanistan, some of whom will face lengthy deployments lasting months or perhaps even longer. By definition, that is stressful for them and their families. Will he therefore assure me that there will be a leave rota in place that will ensure that these people can come home to their families on a regular basis during their deployment in Afghanistan?

Gavin Williamson: We will work closely with the families federations to ensure that that happens. If someone is on a six-month tour, they have the ability to come back for two weeks during that tour. Someone on a nine-month tour has the ability to come back for two sessions of two weeks. Obviously, we will be working with all forces to ensure that that is made available to people.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I welcome the statement that our involvement is limited to training. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that there will be no mission creep and no return to combat duties? Drawing hard on the positive scenes in Kabul during the ceasefire, which were inspiring for ordinary people there, will he say, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, that we should increase our efforts to encourage the political process and try to get the two sides talking to each other, as that is the only way we are going to get peace?

Gavin Williamson: I have been clear in my statement about our commitment. We do not have any intention to change what we are doing, as outlined in my statement. The point is that we all want to find a peaceful solution for Afghanistan, and that is why we will continue to support the Afghan Government in reaching that peaceful solution.
Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What is the Secretary of State doing with the Home Office to address the issues faced by the Afghan interpreters who have settled here under the Government’s scheme, but are now facing real difficulties in being reunited with their families here because of the normal spousal visa rules? The work of those interpreters was crucial and dangerous, and they deserve better.

Gavin Williamson: As a Department, we have consistently worked closely with the Home Office to ensure that any issues brought to our attention have been resolved. We made a change in our policy just a few weeks ago that we hope will be of further assistance to more of those people who helped and supported the British armed forces. We will continue to review that and provide what help we can.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): When I chided President Ghani over his lack of co-operation on the return of failed asylum seekers, he told me that as a war president his priority was the young men and women taking the fight to the Taliban, rather than those who had run away. It was a fair point, was it not?

Gavin Williamson: We recognise the enormous contribution that so many people made—not just those working with British forces, but the Afghan security forces, who are taking the fight to the insurgents every single day. I am talking about not just the Taliban, but Daesh and other states that seek to extend their influence into Afghanistan.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): May I associate myself and my colleagues with the Secretary of State’s tribute to those who made the supreme sacrifice, including many from Northern Ireland—I think of several from my constituency? Given the deployment that is about to take place, what steps will he take to ensure that other nation states will share skills and training, as we obviously have, so that there is better future for everyone in Afghanistan?

Gavin Williamson: This is very much a coalition effort. Last year, a number of nations stepped up to increase their effort and deployment in Afghanistan, and we will be pushing this point going forward. We want all nations to be pushing this point going forward. We want all nations to be part of it. I will write to the hon. Gentleman to provide further clarity on the breakdown of the numbers.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): Will the Secretary of State join me in thanking members of the 1st Battalion the Grenadier Guards from the Aldershot garrison for their continued contribution to the security and stability of Kabul? Will he tell the House his assessment of the link between the Taliban and Daesh?

Gavin Williamson: We see this deployment as a vital part of increasing stability and security, giving the Afghan forces the confidence to be more forward leaning in dealing with threats, but it is the political process that is so vital. This is about the Afghan Government sending the clear message that they are a Government who represent every part of Afghanistan, and can deliver peace and justice there. The reserves are such an integral part of everything we do. This deployment will be comprised predominantly of regulars, but many, many reservists will be part of it. I will write to the hon. Gentleman to provide further clarity on the breakdown of the numbers.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): British forces are renowned for not only their military capability, but their ability to capture hearts and minds. Will my right hon. Friend therefore further explain our objectives and also tell us the expertise we will apply that is unique to Britain?

Gavin Williamson: We have been pivotal to creating the ethos and template for the Afghan military academy, giving the country’s armed forces the skills, training and knowledge they need to be able to command forces in often hostile and difficult environments. Those skills, along with what we will bring in terms of command to the Kabul security force, will be vital, because people turn to us as a nation that has an understanding of Afghanistan and the ability to lead other nations.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Towards the end of his statement, the Defence Secretary described NATO as a “cornerstone” of our defence in dark and unpredictable times, and he also underlined our commitment to NATO. Will he assure us that that sentiment will be impressed upon the US President at the NATO summit this week? Will he assure us that we will stand by ready to defend our allies in NATO against any vocal attacks?

Gavin Williamson: The unity of allies is the greatest strength of NATO, and I am sure that everyone will sign up to that message.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): I briefly worked in New Zealand, so I am very conscious of the ties between our two countries. Although NATO is the cornerstone of our defence, will the Secretary of State comment on the importance of the wider military alliance?
Gavin Williamson: We have a deep and enduring relationship with not only New Zealand, but all “Five Eyes” nations. We are seeing a deepening of that relationship in terms of not just operations, but the sharing of capabilities. Of course, we had the great news of the purchase of Type 26 frigates by the Royal Australian Navy. I was speaking to my counterpart in New Zealand just at the weekend, and we are looking at how we can operate more together to deal with the threats that are emerging in the world.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): I echo the comments of other Members who have expressed our thoughts for the families of the Welsh Guards facing deployment.

Yesterday, frustrated by the lack of progress, the US Administration announced that they were going to conduct a comprehensive review of their Afghanistan strategy. The Secretary of State will be aware of Trump’s initial policy to withdraw from Afghanistan when he assumed the presidency. Given that we have now been at war in Afghanistan for 17 years, does this latest deployment indicate that in reality the current strategy is failing?

Gavin Williamson: Over the past few years, we have seen the United States commitment to Afghanistan grow, along with the pressure that it is putting on other partners to contribute to a political solution. The true solution to the situation in Afghanistan is a political process, and that is what we, NATO and the United States are promoting.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): Just over 13 years ago, I deployed to Kabul on my first Afghanistan tour, and I found it very rewarding indeed. I wish the Welsh Guards well. The frustration during that first tour was the imbalance in commitment and risk appetite between the NATO countries that made up the Kabul Multinational Brigade. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is not just numbers and budgets that underpin NATO, but member states’ willingness actually to deploy their troops with rules of engagement and a risk appetite that allows them to contribute fully to alliance operations?

Gavin Williamson: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct in his assessment of what is needed for resolute support work and to operate in the best possible way. We need those common rules of engagement, and we have to be forward-leaning to ensure that we give the Afghan Government as much support as is needed.

National Health Service

Motion for leave to introduce a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

1.21 pm

Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to introduce a Bill to re-establish the Secretary of State’s legal duty as to the National Health Service in England and to make provision about the other duties of the Secretary of State in that regard; to make provision for establishing Integrated Health Boards and about the administration and accountability of the National Health Service in England; to make provision about ending private finance initiatives in the National Health Service in England; to exclude the National Health Service from international trade agreements; to repeal sections 38 and 39 of the Immigration Act 2014; and for connected purposes.

As we celebrate 70 years since the NHS was founded, it is a privilege to have the opportunity to present to the House this Bill on the reinstatement of the NHS. It was founded in 1948 by a Labour Government, who recognised that, as Nye Bevan said:

“No society can legitimately call itself civilised if a sick person is denied medical aid because of lack of means.”

The Bill honours that founding vision of the national health service.

In short, the Bill proposes to fully restore the NHS in England as an accountable public service. It is intended to give back to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care the duty to provide services, including hospitals, medical and nursing services, primary care, and mental health and community services. It would integrate health services under the Secretary of State, while allowing the delegation of public health services to local authorities. The intent behind the Bill is to take private profits out of the NHS by abolishing the purchaser-provider split and repealing the competition and marketisation provisions in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. It is intended to make sure that the NHS is properly funded and ready to deliver the comprehensive care that people need now and in future.

The Bill is about getting private, profit-making companies out of NHS service provision, ending contracting out and reversing nearly 30 years of marketisation. It would end private practice and pay beds in NHS hospitals, and end contracts for GP services with commercial companies. It would create truly accountable local NHS planning, re-establishing public bodies capable of providing integrated services and accountable to local communities. The Bill would abolish NHS England, clinical commissioning groups, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts. It would scrap private finance initiatives and ensure that NHS assets and land remain in public ownership for future generations. The Bill is intended to make sure that no part of our NHS is up for sale, and would protect it from any forthcoming global trade agreement designed to asset-strip its resources.

For decades, core NHS values have been undermined. I was a nurse for 40 years before entering Parliament and saw this first hand. I was also a member of Unison and fought against it. We might hear that there is no privatisation because the NHS remains free, but believe me, it is being privatised. The fact that services are free to patients does not mean that they are not run by private companies for profit. That profit does not go...
The Government downplay the amount spent by the NHS in the private sector but, according to the NHS Support Federation, in the year to April 2017, some £7.1 billion-worth of NHS clinical contracts was awarded through an NHS tendering process. The 2012 Act forced NHS contracts out to competitive tender in the marketplace, allowing private companies to cherry-pick profitable NHS services. Since that Act came into force, spending on non-NHS providers has totalled around £25 billion. That undermines NHS services and affects staff pay and conditions. The Government line is that only a trivial 7.6% of NHS services are run privately. According to the NHS Support Federation, for-profit companies won £3.1 billion-worth of new contracts in 2016-17. That is 43% of the total value of those advertised. The number of contracts awarded to the private sector has increased sevenfold since the 2012 Act came into force.

Under current arrangements, clinical commissioning groups do not have to serve a particular geographic area and are not required to tend to all illnesses and conditions. This is not the NHS that I understand and love. In some areas, certain treatments—such as hip and knee replacements and cataract operations—are already being rationed. It is vital to reinstate the Secretary of State’s duty, to provide the Government accountability needed to maintain a comprehensive NHS. An integrated structure would also mean we would have an opportunity to change the way social care is addressed. The NHS is for everyone, including the elderly and those with complex needs. Integrated health services and social services would be a welcome return to how the NHS previously gave care to those in need.

The Bill addresses the impact of the 2012 Act’s raising of the amount of income hospitals were permitted to make from private sources. That has shot up from 2% to 49%, which means that an NHS hospital could choose to devote 49% of its resources to private patients. That could be 49% of its precious beds. Such a scenario is almost upon us. For example, the Royal Marsden, with beds used by both NHS and private patients, has seen its income from private patients rise by 105% to £91.1 million—nearly a third of its total funding. That cannot have happened without an impact on NHS patients.

NHS trusts are almost £1 billion in deficit, and it does not take much imagination to believe that NHS trust managers will see further increases in private patient care as a solution to this dire situation. The impact on NHS patients is obvious: it is the very embodiment of a two-tier system. With this ideology directed at it, no wonder the NHS is in crisis. The road we are travelling on is leading to a much diminished service. It is leading to a US-style health insurance system. That is not what I signed up to in 1977 when I started my training: I signed up to provide love, support and care to patients and their families, treating them all equally, whether they had money or not.

The Bill would impose a duty on the Treasury to minimise—and, if possible, end—the expenditure of public money on private finance initiatives in the NHS. Government Members might come back at me and say that PFI was wholeheartedly embraced by the previous Labour Government; well, not by me, and not on my watch. I was with Unison, fighting PFI every step of the way. Ending expenditure on PFI would contribute to returning the NHS to its founding principle and signal a return to the public service ethos that the NHS is famous for and that drives everyone involved to deliver the highest standard of care.

As a former nurse who is immensely proud of the NHS, I thank and pay tribute to the many patients, nurses, doctors, trade unions and campaigners across the country who have worked tirelessly to combat its privatisation. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for York Central (Rachael Maskell) and for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) and the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) for the work that they have done on this Bill. The Bill has been created with the Labour Front-Bench leadership team and we will continue to work together on its future development with campaigners, unions, professionals and stakeholders.

Although, apparently, Nye Bevan did not actually say these words, everything that he ever said and did suggests that he wholeheartedly believed in them: “The NHS will last as long as there are folk left with faith to fight for it.”

I have that faith. I left nursing and entered politics to fight for the NHS and to help to save it.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered.

That Eleanor Smith, Bambos Charalambous, Mr Jim Cunningham, Caroline Lucas, Luke Pollard, Jo Platt, Matt Western, Laura Smith, Stephen Timms, Thelma Walker, Mohammad Yasin and Dr Rupa Huq present the Bill.

Eleanor Smith accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 October and be printed (Bill 250).
Opposition Day

[16th Allotted Day]

The Secretary of State’s Handling of Universal Credit

1.32 pm

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House censures the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the right hon. Member for Tatton, for her handling of the roll-out of universal credit and her response to the NAO report, Rolling Out Universal Credit; notes that the Department for Work and Pensions’ own survey of claimants published on 8 June 2018 showed that 40 per cent of claimants were experiencing financial hardship even nine months into a claim and that 20 per cent of claimants were unable to make a claim online; further censures the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for not pausing the roll-out of universal credit in the light of this evidence; and calls on the Government to reduce the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions’ ministerial salary to zero for four weeks.

The findings of the report “Rolling out Universal Credit” by the National Audit Office, published on 15 June, were damning: universal credit is failing to achieve its aims and there is currently no evidence to suggest that it ever will; it may cost more than the benefits system it replaces; the Department for Work and Pensions will never be able to measure whether it has achieved its stated goal of increasing employment; and it has not delivered value for money and it is uncertain that it ever will.

The NAO report raised real concerns about the impact on claimants, particularly the delays in payments, which are pushing people into debt, rent arrears and even forcing them to turn to food banks to survive. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions took nearly a week to come to the House to respond to the report on what is the Government’s flagship social security programme and a major public project. When she did so on 21 June, on a Thursday when she knew that many Members would not be able to be here, she undermined the report rather than address the extremely serious issues that it raised.

Her approach was shockingly complacent. It was as though she was oblivious to the hardship that so many people are suffering. She referred to universal credit as an example of “leading-edge technology” and “agile working practices”. She said that it was “a unique example of great British innovation”

She said:

“Countries such as New Zealand, Spain, France and Canada have met us”—
the Department for Work and Pensions—
“to see UC, to watch and learn what is happening for the next generation of benefit systems”——[Official Report, 21 June 2018; Vol. 643, c. 491.]

I do hope that they will listen to the testimony given by our Members today.

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): I have listened to what the hon. Lady has said. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State had the courtesy to come to the House to apologise, Mr Speaker accepted that apology, has the Labour Front-Bench team the good grace to accept it, too?

Margaret Greenwood: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He will be aware, and I will cover this further on in my speech, that she apologised for one of the three aspects for which an apology was necessary.

David Hanson (Delyn) (Lab): Last week, on 5 July, following my question at Work and Pensions questions on Monday, the Secretary of State said that she had made an error and wanted to report it to the House—as reported in column 500 of Hansard. Why does my hon. Friend think that it took 48 hours for her to come to the House when a written apology, or an apology on the Monday or Tuesday, could have done the job? Was it because the National Audit Office published its report at 11 o’clock on Wednesday?

Margaret Greenwood: My right hon. Friend raises such an important point. I was as shocked as he was to hear the Secretary of State say that it was when she had left the Chamber that she realised her mistake. She should have replied that afternoon. He is quite right on that point.

The Secretary of State adopted the same approach at Work and Pensions questions, as has been noted, leading the head of the National Audit Office, Sir Amyas Morse, to take the extraordinary step of writing an open letter to her, taking issue with a number of claims that she had made in response to the report. The three key claims that he took issue with were, first, that the NAO report said that the roll-out of universal credit should be speeded up; secondly, that the report “didn’t take account of changes made by the government in the Budget”; and, thirdly, that universal credit is working.

Let us just think about the significance of this. The National Audit Office is an independent body that scrutinises public spending before Parliament. It is responsible for auditing central Government Departments. Its reports matter. I shall take each claim in turn.

On 21 June, the Secretary of State stated on several occasions that the report had said that the Government should speed up the roll-out of universal credit. She repeated that claim at Work and Pensions oral questions on 2 July, when questioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (David Hanson) and me. Of course, the NAO report does not say anywhere that the roll-out should be speeded up. In fact, it says very clearly that the Government should “ensure the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes.”

Ruth George (High Peak) (Lab): This is an incredibly important point. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as we are seeing 100,000 households rolling on to universal credit this year and 200,000 next year, with 40% in hardship, we are talking about millions of real people, real families, whose lives are being affected by the speed of this roll-out?

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is an issue of the utmost importance and the Government must take note.

Bim Afolami (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): Does the hon. Lady accept that the NAO report does not take into account what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State
State and the Department have done recently in line with their “listen and learn” approach with the roll-out of universal credit?

Margaret Greenwood: I will come on to that point in my remarks.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The report, rather perversely in my view, complains that the roll-out has been too slow. Is it unreasonable for us to assume that it would like us to hurry up?

Margaret Greenwood: The right hon. Gentleman should go back and re-read the report.

On 4 July, the Secretary of State finally admitted that she had “inadvertently” misled Parliament in claiming that the roll-out should be speeded up. This matters not just because she admitted that she had misled Parliament, but, as I will explain later, because the Government have sharply accelerated the roll-out of universal credit since May and because, from next year it, they will start a managed migration of 3.9 million people on legacy benefits across to universal credit.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the evidence on the use of food banks needs to be urgently looked at before the roll-out can continue?

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes an absolutely pertinent remark. The prevalence of food banks in our society is a source of shame on this Government.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): We have to put this whole debate on universal credit in context. In at least two general elections, the Government said in their manifestos that they would cut £12 billion off the national health service. What we have is a benefit system that is tailor-made for cuts and not for the benefit of the people who receive it.

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point about cuts.

The Secretary of State’s second claim was that the report did not take into account the impact of recent changes made by the Government. This is curious.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with everything that my hon. Friend is saying. She has already quoted the National Audit Office report. From that quotation, does it not sound to her as though the NAO’s view is that this is unproven. The DWP’s own survey of claimants under the full service published in June shows that just over half of all claimants were unable to register their claim online unassisted, a quarter were not able to claim online unassisted, a quarter were not able to submit their claim online at all and 40% were falling behind with bills or experiencing real financial difficulties, sometimes even nine months into their claim. A recent freedom of information request revealed that a fifth of universal credit claims are failing at an early stage because claimants are not able to navigate the online system. These people are likely to be among the most vulnerable in our society, and this Government are failing them.

Anneliese Dodds (Oxford East) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Precisely on that point—which I have raised repeatedly with Ministers, but to no avail—does she accept that the Government’s position of not allowing advice agencies to help people with their claims after they changed the implied consent

The Secretary of State refused to back down and said again in a letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier)—dated only yesterday that, although she had full confidence in the NAO and its head, “that does not mean the Department will always agree with all of the judgements reached by the NAO.”

Will she tell us now, once and for all, whether or not her Department agreed the report with the NAO in writing on 8 June?

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Greenwood: I am not going to give way: I want to make some progress. Thirdly, the Secretary of State claimed—

Mr Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Greenwood: I am not going to give way and I would point out that the right hon. Gentleman has called the report “shoddy”, so excuse me if I continue. Thirdly, the Secretary of State claimed that universal—

[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. If the hon. Lady does not want to give way, it is completely up to her.

Margaret Greenwood: Thirdly, the Secretary of State claimed that universal credit is working.

Simon Hoare: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is it not a custom in this place, out of common courtesy, that when one hon. Member references another—either by name or by constituency—and that Member then seeks to intervene, the request is usually acceded to?

Madam Deputy Speaker: It is absolutely up to the hon. Lady whether to take any interventions. Hon. Members really should not be interrupting speeches with points of order over and again. It is becoming a bit of a habit, and not a very healthy one.

Margaret Greenwood: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State claimed that universal credit is working.

The Secretary of State refused to back down and said again in a letter to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee—my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier)—dated only yesterday that, although she had full confidence in the NAO and its head, “that does not mean the Department will always agree with all of the judgements reached by the NAO.”
Mr Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Greenwood: I have three minutes of my speech left, so I will take no more interventions.

The Secretary of State repeatedly claims her Department is testing and learning, but this testing and learning is using people like guinea pigs. This is unacceptable.

Rules are shown to be completely bankrupt when such a high proportion of people cannot get their claims sorted out online!

Margaret Greenwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Mr Duncan Smith: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Greenwood: I have three minutes of my speech left, so I will take no more interventions.

The Secretary of State claimed that the NAO report did not take account of the impact of recent Government changes. However, there have been no recent changes to support people in making and managing their claim online, and we know that the Government’s universal support programme receives only limited funding. The payment delays that people are experiencing are shocking.

The DWP this week published figures on the length of payment delays for new claims due in February. The Library estimates that nearly 13,000 people were not paid in full on time and 7,500 people did not receive any payment on time at all. In December, two thirds of disabled people with limited capability for work were not paid in full on time, and last year 113,000 people—a quarter of new claims—were not paid in full on time. This is outrageous. Why were they not paid in full on time and what is the Secretary of State going to do about it? These are people on low incomes who often do not have any savings to rely on in these circumstances. The delays are causing real hardship for people, leading them to build up debt and rent arrears.

The Residential Landlords Association has made it clear that private landlords are increasingly reluctant to rent to people claiming universal credit. The National Housing Federation this week reported that nearly three quarters of housing association tenants in England claiming universal credit are in debt, compared with less than a third of all other tenants. The Government claim that no one should have to suffer hardship because advances are available, although, as the NAO said, the Government “has not measured the impact on claimants or assessed how much hardship Universal Credit claimants suffer.”

Should it not be the Government’s duty to understand the effectiveness of their own social security system?

Advances have to be paid back, often on top of debts for utility bills and council tax arrears built up while waiting for the initial payment. One of the Secretary of State’s senior officials told the Public Accounts Committee on Monday this week that the average monthly repayment of £35 a week is “not eye-wateringly large”. Maybe not to him, but what about someone on very low income struggling to cope with basic household bills? I have received so much testimony from people up and down the country on this issue. I have heard stories of people being sanctioned because they have accompanied their mother to a cancer treatment session and stories of people with special needs not receiving the support that they should.

I put it to the Government that their policy of managed migration of just under 4 million people on legacy benefits across to universal credit that is due next year risks huge problems for the people who transfer. Although they will receive transitional protection, it will only last for two years, and the DWP’s current plan is that those people will have to make a new universal credit claim. This could bring chaos.

The NAO has made it absolutely clear that the Government should not expand universal credit until they are clear that the system could cope with higher claimant volumes. If the Government fail to get this right, there will be many people whose lives are made a misery by a benefit that is meant to support them. That is why the Secretary of State’s inadvertently misleading claim that the NAO report says that the roll-out should be speeded up matters so much. Will she give an assurance that the Government will not start managed migration until it is clear that universal credit and her Department can cope with it?

Universal credit was created to simplify the social security system. Clearly, its complexity is so often defeating both claimants and the staff administering it. It was meant to lift people out of poverty; instead it is pushing many into debt. The Government claim that the Opposition are scaremongering whenever we raise issues about the suffering of our constituents. Well, the Residential Landlords Association, the National Housing Federation, Citizens Advice, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, the Resolution Foundation and the Institute for Fiscal Studies have all raised major concerns about universal credit.

The Secretary of State repeatedly claims her Department is testing and learning, but this testing and learning is using people like guinea pigs. This is unacceptable.

Why is the dignity? Her Government are causing misery by a benefit that is meant to support them. That is why the Secretary of State should call a halt to universal credit and put forward a credible plan to fix its many failings before many more people suffer.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): The Question is as on the Order Paper. I call the Secretary of State.

1.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Ms Esther McVey): Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you for clearing that up—that we are discussing the Question as is on the Order Paper.

We are introducing a new benefits system to assist people into work in this new technological era—a system that will support people so that they can become more economically secure and progress in life. We are introducing universal credit to remove the problems of the old benefits system that we inherited and that put barriers in the way of people fulfilling their potential.

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Ms McVey: I will not give way just yet, but I will in a moment.

There used to be the 16-hour rule, which we all know about. That barrier was stopping people working more hours, and then they would have to go through the disruption of coming off benefit to start another benefit.
People on employment and support allowance could be faced with a choice between financial support and work, although we know that thousands of them would have liked to work as well. Once people were in work, they were too often caught up by another set of rules and hours for tax credits. Do we not all remember and know all too well the problems with tax credits, given the hundreds of thousands of letters that we received?

Universal credit cuts through all of that by bringing the six different benefits together and replacing them with a single system whereby claimants receive tailored support to help them into work—a system whereby claimants only have to deal with one organisation and a system that ensures that it always pays to be in work. This is what we are doing. Let me relay again how many people we have now helped into work since 2010—over 3.3 million people, or 1,000 more every day, through the support we are giving. The roll-out is slow. Where we need to slow down we have done, and where we have needed to make changes we have done.

Several hon. Members rose—

Ms McVeY: I will give way, but I think we just need a moment to reflect. This is about getting people into work, and that is precisely what we are doing.

Liam Byrne (Birmingham, Hodge Hill) (Lab): The Secretary of State will remember that back in 2013 I warned that this was not a benefit that was ready for widespread roll-out. In my Birmingham constituency, we have the DWP telling my constituents that they cannot apply for housing credit through universal credit. They get sent to Birmingham City Council, which then sends them back to the DWP. There is still a level of chaos on the frontline that meant that one of my constituents told me that not only could they not afford to eat, she could not afford to put socks on her children’s feet.

Ms McVeY: And this from the man who said there was no money left. But to be fair, he actually has some honour, because that was correct.

Before we go any further—

Several hon. Members rose—

Ms McVeY: Hang on, everybody.

The comments that are being made today are the comments that we had to check for accuracy, which were sent out to scare people just before Christmas. An email from the Labour party on 6 December said that “40,000 children will wake up in poverty on Christmas Day”. It also sent out a video—checking the accuracy here—saying that “millions of people are faced with poverty, debt and eviction as a result of Universal Credit” and asking us to pause and fix universal credit. This went to the UK Statistics Authority, which said:

“It is clearly important that statements by a political party should be fully supported by statistics and sources...We do not believe they were. As I am in a generous mood today, will Opposition Front Benchers take this opportunity to apologise? They have not so far. It took me two days to apologise. Would they like to apologise?"
need help and support. We know that some of them might not be able to use IT. We have brought in this system because in this modern age where technology is vital, people can only get a job if they can go online. We are now going to provide that universal support to allow people to go online. We have put £200 million into local authorities to help and support people with budgeting and IT. I will offer Opposition Front Benchers the opportunity to apologise for putting out this information. Would they like to take that opportunity now? It seems they are not doing to be doing that now.

I go back to the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) about fact checks in the Department and what happened there. He is looking for the timeline. I left here having checked what was going on. I then asked the Department to go through the various bits that we did together and said that there were various elements within the letter. That night, I checked it again, and so it was Tuesday when I asked for permission to come to the House. The timeline on which I was allowed to do it—he is quite right—was 48 hours later, but actually it was Tuesday when I asked to come to the House. I then met Amyas Morse on Monday and we discussed the various elements of the report. As I said, I have faith in the organisation—of course I do—but that does not mean that you always have to come to the same conclusion—the same judgments—from a report. I am rather surprised—or maybe not—that so many Opposition Members talk about auditors in another way. People can look at different sets of facts and come to a different result, which is what we did.

I said it was unfortunate that the NAO could not have taken into account all the impacts of those changes; that was not anything against the organisation. Those changes came in in January, February and April, so the NAO could not have taken them into account. I was not casting any aspersions on the organisation. It is interesting to note that paragraph 2.34 of the NAO’s report says:

“It is too early to assess the impact of this change.”

It says that in the report. In that instance, which is what we were talking about, it was too early to have felt the impacts of all those changes, and that is the crunch of it. When I misspoke, I corrected myself, but the impacts of the changes could not have been felt.

Catherine West: Thank you the right hon. Lady for giving way. What does she make of the evidence about people who have fallen off benefits and are not good on computers, one of whom is sleeping in a tent in a bin chamber on the Vincent Square estate in my constituency but now has to be moved on? These people have no help. They do not have what it takes for this difficult set of benefit rules.

Ms McVey: If people have fallen on hard times, we reach out to and support them. If that person is not getting the support, I ask the hon. Lady to work with me. We can go to the local jobcentre to see what has happened, because that is not right, and ensure that he gets his support and that we get him into housing and get him the benefits he needs. Rather than someone standing up and saying those things, let us work together, across the Floor of the House, to help that person who needs it. Is she prepared to work with me to help that person?
Ms McVey: We are bringing in a new benefit system. We have helped 1,000 people a day into work since 2010. We have said that where we have got it wrong, we will change it and put it right, which we have done in instances where we felt it was wrong. The aim is to get people prepared for a modern technological age so that they can engage in work, and we will support people who cannot as best we can. That is what a compassionate party does—help people into work and support those who cannot work.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the spokesperson for the Scottish National party, colleagues will be aware that a large number of Members wish to speak, so I will have to impose a five-minute time limit immediately.

2.7 pm

Neil Gray (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): I will take that on board, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I thank you for your comments in this debate.

I should begin by welcoming the hon. Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson) back to the DWP. Even though it contributed to his return to Government, there surely can be no one gladder of the Chequers version of “Deal or No Deal” than the Work and Pensions Secretary. For a few days, the pressure to fall on her sword was off her, as her extreme Brexiteer chums climbed the altar of vanity to fall on theirs.

But now we must return from the Brexit bubble theatrics to the real world, where we have this week another set of reports following hot on the heels of the National Audit Office report, all condemning the current incarnation of universal credit. The Secretary of State’s position has been called into question, not just because of the failings of universal credit, but also because of her tin-eared response to the externally and expertly provided facts and criticism. I listened carefully to her speech just now, and it appears that there is still little contrition.

We come to the Secretary of State’s response to the National Audit Office report, which is the subject of the motion before us. We know that the NAO report blew a hole as wide as the Clyde in the Government’s defence of universal credit. The Government say that universal credit is about getting people into work quicker and will lead to 200,000 more people in work. The NAO says:

“The Department will never be able to measure whether Universal Credit actually leads to 200,000 more people in work, because it cannot isolate the effect of Universal Credit from other economic factors in increasing employment.”

The Government say that universal credit will be cheaper to administer and reduce fraud. The NAO says that the DWP

“does not know whether Universal Credit is reducing fraud”

and:

“It is not clear that Universal Credit will cost less to administer than the existing benefits system.”

The Government say they will save £8 billion from universal credit, but the NAO says that figure “depends on some unproven assumptions”, and that such benefits “remain theoretical”.

The NAO has directly contradicted the Government on the core aims of, and the central defences offered by, the Government on, universal credit. It is therefore no wonder that the Secretary of State was so desperate to discredit the NAO on the Monday before last. For instance, in response to the question from the right hon. Member for Delyn (David Hanson) about the NAO recommending a pause in the roll-out, the Secretary of State said:

“The NAO made clear quite the opposite: it said that we need to continue with universal credit. It was also concerned that it was rolling out too slowly and said that actually we should increase what we are doing. So what the right hon. Gentleman says is absolutely not what the NAO said.”—[Official Report, 2 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 8.]

Actually, the NAO report said that the DWP should:

“Ensure that operational performance and costs improve sustainably before increasing caseloads through managed migration. It should formally assess the readiness of automation and digital systems to support increased caseloads before migration begins, and ensure the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes.”

These are not debating points; these are facts and quotes in black and white. We have a Work and Pensions Secretary who is either unable to grasp the facts or unwilling to accept them.

David Hanson: When the Secretary of State said that to me in the House, some of my constituents were watching the proceedings, and they believed that I was factually incorrect in my comments. The Secretary of State had an opportunity to apologise to me, but she has yet to do so in writing, and this was all before the NAO issued its report. The question for me, which I raised in my intervention earlier, is: why did the Secretary of State wait 48 hours to put the record straight?

Neil Gray: I take the right hon. Gentleman’s point. The honourable thing for the Secretary of State to do would have been to apologise directly to him for what might have been a slur on his character and reputation.

This is important, because we are talking about the central—the flagship—social security policy of this Government, which has been criticised in report after report for failing those it should be helping. We are talking about people who are living in poverty as a result. Getting the facts wrong—not just failing on a debating point, but misquoting what is there in black and white—is very serious whichever way we cut it. The House should remember that the last Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for Hastings and Rye (Amber Rudd), recently resigned for something very similar.

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham) (Con): The hon. Gentleman talks about facts, but is it not a fact that 83% of claimants are happier on universal credit, and they are more likely to be in a job within the first six months? Is it not a fact that universal credit is an opportunity for people to get back into work?

Neil Gray: On the last point, the NAO entirely contradicted the hon. Lady’s point. One fact I would relay back to her is that the Government’s own figures—this is from the DWP—show that 40% of universal credit claimants are living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet. I hope she will consider that fact as we build
towards the autumn Budget, when I hope we can form a coalition around calling on the Chancellor to invest in universal credit.

Mr Jim Cunningham: The hon. Gentleman is making some excellent points. When we talk about getting people back into work, we lose track of the fact that people who have serious illnesses and will never work again are facing delays in their personal independence payments, but nothing seems to happen about it. I have a number of cases like that, and if the Secretary of State wants, I will send them to her so that she can see this for herself.

Neil Gray: The hon. Gentleman makes some very fair points. We of course know from the recent statistics published by the DWP that 59% of claimants impacted by the two-child policy on tax credits and by universal credit are already in work. These are facts, and the Government should be considering them.

This is not of course the first time that this Government have tried to dismiss evidence placed before them showing the failures of universal credit. When the Trussell Trust said that food bank use was higher in areas where universal credit had been rolled out, UK Ministers described its evidence as “anecdotal”. In actual fact, the evidence came from 425 food banks across these isles, delivering 1.3 million three-day food parcels a year.

This week, the four housing association federations of these isles have called on the UK Government to fix the “fundamentally flawed” universal credit system. With colleagues, I met the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations this morning, and it revealed the scale and linkage of debt with universal credit. It is startling, and it is evidence-based. Ministers have replied that issues related to the linkage of debt with universal credit are in debt, compared with less than a third or 29% of all other tenants.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Gray: I will give way one last time, because I am conscious that others want to speak.

Ms Eagle: Does the hon. Gentleman see, as I do, a pattern of reluctance on the part of this Government to collect evidence and information precisely so that they can deny the effects of universal credit, and somehow pretend that the evidence that is accumulating is anecdotal?

Neil Gray: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. One of the central tenets of what the NAO called for in its report was that that type of evidence gathering needs to be done.

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Neil Gray: I said that that was the last intervention I would take.

The evidence is there—it is in black and white—with the clear researched correlation between universal credit and housing debt. It is not even close; any responsible organisation, never mind a Government, would look at that type of key performance indicator and say, “Right, how do we fix this, because it’s failing?” Why are this Government so determined to push back, ignore the evidence, plough on in the face of the evidence and pile more misery on more families? That is what is behind these statistics—people and families, such as the two constituents in tears at my Airdrie surgery a week past Friday. For some reason, on universal credit this Government ignore the evidence and the lived experience, but are happy to deceive and never accept responsibility.

It is to responsibility that I turn in directly addressing the thrust of Labour’s motion. Labour has suggested that it tabled this motion to stop the Secretary of State’s salary for a month to replicate the experiences of people on universal credit who are sanctioned and, I suppose, so that the Secretary of State had a chance to make the same choices as those on whom she inflicts her policies, to paraphrase the right hon. Lady. The universal credit sanctions regime is utterly punitive, and in the words of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, is akin to “destitution by design”. I was therefore hesitant last night, when contemplating the motion, about whether we should support it or rise above the deplorable conduct of the Secretary of State’s sanctioning regime. For the reasons I have already outlined, however, I think the Secretary of State should be considering her position.

Of course, a new Secretary of State will not necessarily fix the problems with universal credit. Perhaps the right hon. Lady could redeem herself by honouring the original concept of universal credit on which she worked, in a previous role, with the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith). He of course resigned because the Treasury was cutting universal credit to ribbons. In spite of this motion, I reiterate the calls I have made in the past about working with the Government to improve universal credit. I am sure all Members on both sides of the House would take such an opportunity should a genuinely listening ear be afforded to us.

Of course, the Government are not short of suggestions from expert agencies and the third sector. We have already heard about the suggestions of the NAO, which I have not actually heard the Secretary of State comment on or respond to. Those include improving the tracking and transparency of progress towards universal credit’s intended benefits, and working with delivery partners to establish a shared evidence base on how UC is working in practice, as the hon. Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) mentioned.

Housing associations have talked this week about issues, on top of the process improvements, that the Government could easily sort out, such as getting payments on time or allowing housing associations and other advocacy organisations to negotiate on behalf of recipients. Housing associations want implicit consent restored and the two-child limit and benefit cap to be scrapped, and they also want to see work allowances restored and the self-employed protected. At my meeting with the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations this morning, I was reminded of just how unusual it is for the four federations to campaign collectively on such an issue, given the devolved nature of housing policy. That is how seriously they see the threat of the further roll-out of universal credit without significant changes.
The point of universal credit was to make social security easier to navigate: it does not. It was supposed to be easier and cheaper to administer: it is not. It was supposed to make work pay: it does not. In reality, the cuts being made to universal credit may be saving the Treasury on the DWP budget line, but they will be costing it significantly more in other areas. With worsening mental health, it is costing NHS services. In increased requirement for conditionality and cuts to income, it is costing our local authorities in welfare rights officers and rent arrears. In allowing children to go hungry, it is costing our education outcomes.

Rather than working in silos, we need a new cross-departmental and cross-party approach, and we need that before universal credit reaches our largest cities, such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen, which are due to be migrated soon. The NAO stressed its concern about any further roll-out until the issues it raised are addressed. We agree. We have been saying so for years. So my appeal to the Secretary of State is to work across the House and with the third sector to take a strong coalition to persuade the Chancellor to invest in universal credit at the autumn Budget.

2.21 pm

**Derek Thomas** (St Ives) (Con): The only things that actually matter today are the life chances of people who have been failed for decades by the benefit system. People who have been trapped out of the workplace do not care two hoots for the politics on display here today.

In a previous life, I worked to support working-age people who had little or no opportunity of getting anywhere near the workplace and satisfying employment. Even those who had abundant talent and wanted to work dared not do so. They were locked out of paid work by the complete disruption getting a job would cause to their benefits, with weeks of no payment whatever until they were reassessed.

**Chris Green** (Bolton West) (Con): Will my hon. Friend reflect on the nature of his constituency? Some constituencies have a great many people earning a great deal of money, but that is not reflected in all constituencies.

**Derek Thomas**: My hon. Friend is right. I went into that work because in west Cornwall we have a significant number of people who could be described as vulnerable, some with severe learning disabilities, and who deserve the support and help that they are beginning to get today.

Under the benefit system that universal credit replaces, potential employers were encouraged to offer placements and pay people a pitiful £4 a day so as not to upset their benefit payments. For years, the welfare system demonstrated loud and clear that large numbers of people had nothing to offer. It was not thought worth the effort to help them into work and they were abandoned indefinitely.

I accept that the roll-out of universal credit has had some significant challenges, which is no surprise, given the complexity of the benefit system it replaces. It is clear that more must be done. I want to thank my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her Ministers for the way they have engaged with Members who have taken specific cases to them. Ministers have engaged with those cases and worked hard to deliver them.

I secured a debate in Westminster Hall some time ago in which I asked the Government to look at the role of voluntary groups on the ground—they are at the coalface helping people—and, as a result, the dynamic purchasing system was introduced. I ask the Secretary of State to look at how well that is helping the charities that are working with those vulnerable people.

**Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): When individual cases go wrong, of course they should be fixed. At a time of record low unemployment this country spends some £90 billion a year on working-age benefits—as it should—but to put that in context, that is more than double what we spend on schools. In those circumstances, does my hon. Friend agree that the suggestion that somehow resources are not being applied is wide of the mark?

**Derek Thomas**: I agree, and I know from my experience of working with some of those vulnerable people that they have untapped talents and skills. Employers want access to those skills, but all sorts of barriers have existed. They are beginning to be broken down now, enabling people to move away from the support my hon. Friend describes and giving them much more control over their lives.

More must be done to improve the roll-out and support families towards achieving greater independence, but the truth is that when the transition from the old system to universal credit is completed, many of the people I meet and have met much prefer the new system. I will continue to support my constituents to transfer to a benefit system that gives them greater control over their finances, and better and smoother opportunities in work and life chances.

My ask of the Government and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is that they ensure that local authorities and jobcentres use the resources they have, including the dynamic purchasing system, much more effectively to help all people who for so long have been locked out of the life chances that we want them to have.

2.25 pm

**Frank Field** (Birkenhead) (Lab): An apology: I was in the House when somebody repeated that campaign phrase against the Secretary of State. I was stunned by what was said, and I hope that she will forgive me for not getting up immediately to object to it. I apologise for my total failure to respond as a human being when that was said, and I hope that she forgives me if I do not actually recite what was said, because such nastiness
and evil is not directed just at her; it is directed at my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle), the neighbouring constituency to the one that the Secretary of State fought. What is occurring is a disgrace. How we stop it, I do not know, but we can at least apologise when it occurs. I am grateful that the right hon. Lady raised it today so that my saying that would be in order.

Ms McVey: I know those words are heartfelt, and I accept that apology. It took a long time for people to come forward. I would have liked those on the Opposition Front Bench to have done so, because they represent the Labour party, and I know that such a thing is not at the heart of the Labour party.

We started off with a ding-dong in the Chamber today. I do not necessarily think that we are at our best in Parliament when we have a ding-dong like that. People watching outside do not understand the real reasons why we, on both sides of the House, came into politics. I put this on the record now: let us work cross-party to get universal credit right. Let us work with third sector organisations to get it right. Let us reach out and get it right, because it affects so many millions of people. We are doing our best, and lots more people are in work, but we can do more. Let us do it together.

Frank Field: One last point: Back Benchers can apologise only for our own action or inaction. That is my apology.

In this debate, one wonders what truth is and what facts are. When reading the NAO report, I reached totally different conclusions to the Secretary of State. I thought the message was that the Comptroller and Auditor General was perplexed beyond belief that he could not recommend to go back or to go forward. There was a clear recommendation that we should pause, and I ask the Secretary of State for that pause—not to scrap universal credit?

Ruth Cadbury: The Secretary of State said that this was a new benefit that was helping people into work. In my London borough of Hounslow, we had full service roll-out for two years and three months, and three quarters of claimants are in work. It has caused incredible problems with people’s claims. Might we have a pause until we make sure the Revenue can service the Secretary of State’s Department in a way that we need for a successful continuation of the roll-out of universal credit?

Thirdly, on debt, on which the Secretary of State could decide today, debts of yester-year are being found and charged to people on universal credit. The repayment of those debts is overwhelming people. I am not saying that people should not pay their debts, but do we not think that feeding one’s children, and ensuring the rent is paid and the heating is on, ought to be at least equal in importance to the repayment of debt? Might I therefore make a plea to the Secretary of State that she looks at the rules—not to scrap the repayment of debt, but the amount that is reclaimed—on debts that most of us will have forgotten?

Ms McVey rose—

Frank Field: I give way willingly.

Ms McVey: Again, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for saying that. I want to reassure him. I have not been in post that long to get to grips with absolutely everything on UC, but debt and how it is repaid is precisely what I am focusing on at the moment.

Frank Field: That is wonderful news, but after the right hon. Lady has considered debt and decided on it there is the business about real-time information. This is not under her control as the information is supplied to her by another Department. It is not real and it is not on time, so perhaps she could look at that as the next item on the list. There is also the crucial business of universal support. I tried to claim, but I could not do it in the time. A lot of us need that support to make sure we can make a claim successfully. If we are going to work cross-party on this, there has to be give on the other side as well as on this side.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): Order. I am very sorry but, because of time constraints, I will now have to impose a three-minute limit.

2.33 pm

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), who has done so much over many years to advance the cause of people on welfare.

There has been recognition over a great many years about the complexity of the system that people need to access for the support they need. In 2010, the then Secretary of State asked for an estimate of how many benefits there were. The estimates ranged from 50 to 60 different benefits. When people are trying to access support, that complexity puts people off. It makes it more difficult for people to access the benefits and support they need. I welcome the sense of “hiding the wiring” with universal credit to enable people to get that support.

The idea that work always pays is absolutely critical. The 16-hour rule is a perverse disincentive to people taking on more work. Not taking on more work means...
that individuals do not get the experience they need. Not taking on more work means that people will not receive the training that someone working 24 hours or 30 hours would receive. Training is an investment by the business in the individual, and getting extra hours enormously improves the chances of that individual receiving training. Better prospects mean that people will get better jobs and better pay, and have more job security.

Two jobcentres in my constituency serve my constituents. Both are pleased—delighted, in fact—to have had the roll-out of universal credit locally, because they find that they can more effectively serve the people they are there to serve. The barriers between the people gaining support and the people delivering that support have come down. It is incumbent on everyone participating in the debate to send out a clear message that increased support is there for people who need it most. The barriers have come down and people in jobcentres are far more able to offer and give that support. We need to tell people who need that support, “Go. Get that support, because it is there.”

I realise that today’s debate is very popular, and that shows the importance of universal credit and of this debate. The Secretary of State should carry on the good work she is doing. My constituency office team does a great deal of work with people in the welfare system. The work of all our constituency offices ought to be recognised, because they provide tremendous support to so many people.

2.36 pm

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Universal credit was a good idea, but the problems we are seeing in our constituencies are very significant. The Trussell Trust told us in its briefing for this debate that when universal credit is fully rolled out in an area, demand for food banks in that area goes up by 52% in the following year compared with 13% in areas where universal credit has not been fully rolled out. I noticed that the National Audit Office looked specifically at what the Trussell Trust said about demand for food banks where universal credit has been fully rolled out. The NAO states that its analysis “aligns with the Trussell Trust’s.”

Indeed, the Department’s own analysis—the survey that the Secretary of State referred to, which was published last month—makes the point, as the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Neil Gray) has told the House that she is listening and that she wants to work with fellow Ministers to ensure that the operations can cope with higher claimant volumes. However, just prolonging the debt that people are in.

Stephen Timms: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If people are forced to depend on an advance right at the beginning of their claim, they are by definition plunged into debt right at the start. I am pleased that the Secretary of State has I think told us today, in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), that she will look at the repayment periods and, hopefully, offer a less demanding repayment schedule than is the case at the moment. However, just prolonging people into debt at the beginning of a claim is a very serious problem.

The Trussell Trust, which I have referred to, said that we should pause the roll-out of universal credit to fix the problems. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) made that plea from the Opposition Front Bench, as she has done repeatedly and rightly. The Secretary of State can perhaps discount those representations, but she should weigh carefully what the National Audit Office said, to which attention has already been drawn today. Its report said that the Government should “ensure the programme does not expand before business-as-usual operations can cope with higher claimant volumes.”

I very much hope that the Secretary of State and her fellow Ministers will weigh that cautionary note very carefully indeed.

2.40 pm

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for East Ham (Stephen Timms), who speaks with great experience on these matters. One of the burning questions this afternoon is whether the Labour party’s official position is to continue to support the principle of universal credit. Every time that Labour has the opportunity to endorse universal credit, it dodges doing that and seeks to tear it down from within.

The hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench, may be interested to hear the observation of one of the senior managers in my local jobcentre in Blandford Forum, which I visited a few weeks ago. He told me that he had been advocating and urging something like universal credit since he joined the service way back in 1986. This simplified approach, making it easier for
people, is absolutely the right way. Likewise, the approach of roll-out, pause, reflect and revise that the Government and the Department have adopted is absolutely the right one. That is in sharp contradistinction to the dramatic roll-out, to trumpets and drums, of the tax credit system, and look at the absolute disaster that that was. The Department's approach is the right one.

The shadow Minister, of course, has form on these matters. In a debate on the national health service in January this year, she told us: “Let us have no more talk about taking the politics out of the NHS. The NHS is a political entity.”—[Official Report, 10 January 2018; Vol. 634, c. 373.]

I chastised her on that. She likes to come forward with crocodile tears, synthetic concern and outrage. Labour Front Benchers merely use this to prey on the concerns of very vulnerable people for what they believe to be cheap political advantage.

The hon. Lady may be interested to hear an email from a constituent of mine—[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris) wants to intervene, he is very welcome to.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): I’m not going to give you more time.

Simon Hoare: Thank you for that. Let me quote from a constituent of mine:

“I went in great fear of UC. I thought it would be too difficult and cruel. I thought things would be made hard for me and my family. But I applied. It was easy and far simpler than I thought.”

He said that the only mistake he made was that he had listened to Labour and that it was Labour that had made him afraid of the process. That is the legacy of the approach.

In closing, I invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to consider—the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) and I have discussed this—the role and effectively the right of audience that those who work for the CAB have in this process. There seems to be some confusion. I suggest to my right hon. Friend that she convene, at a moment of her convenience, some form of roundtable to establish some form of protocol for those in the CAB who do valiant work for our constituents.

Ms McVey: Members on both sides of the House have mentioned that, so I will answer my hon. Friend. I met the CAB the other day. In terms of what we are putting forward, I think what he is suggesting could be in my mind, too. We will be working on something that I can announce pretty shortly; we will be working together to help benefit claimants.

Simon Hoare: I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. That underscores the approach that she has outlined of listening and engaging. In that spirit, I urge her and her Department to issue—this may not be the right phraseology—some form of national guidance to all CAB offices and to all Members across the House on what the role of the CAB is. I take my hat off to them; I have two CAB offices serving my constituency. They often deal with very complex debt issues, which I am certainly not qualified to deal with. We owe those volunteers, who give up so much of their time, a huge debt of thanks. As I said, the hon. Member for Oxford East and I have discussed this. We came to different views on the advice that we had been given, so such guidance would be very welcome indeed.

Let us not forget the value of work and what should always be the temporary nature of state support for people with regards to welfare. It is not a way of life, but a helping hand. It is a safety net to self-determination, self-reliance and support for family. I am convinced that universal credit will deliver that, and it has my support.

2.45 pm

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): The Secretary of State started the debate by asking for an apology about words used towards her by a senior member of my party. I add my apologies to those she has already received from my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). I am very conscious of the plaque that is right over my shoulder. The language of violence and threats to people has no part in our party or our politics, but the context of today’s debate is the Secretary of State’s inaccurate statements, which she has admitted were misleading.

This Government have misled the whole country about universal credit. They have claimed that it is on time. Its delivery to millions of people was meant to be finished in October 2017. We are about 12% of the way through. They claim it has public support, when one nickname locally in Southwark is “Universal Dread-it”. They claim that it supports people in work, when the Secretary of State is meeting a constituent of mine who was self-employed and made homeless as a result of universal credit. They claim that it is on budget, when it costs three times as much to administer a decision on universal credit as the legacy benefits, and it has cost £1.9 billion to get 800,000 people on to universal credit. The general public get that, even if Ministers still want to try to peddle misinformation, and people certainly get it in Southwark, which is a full service area and an early adopter.

In Southwark, the claim that it is a better system has been completely blown apart. The council is owed £5 million in arrears from universal credit recipients alone, and the average arrears are now £1,800-plus. The Government claim that those people were in arrears before, but that is simply not true. With a legacy benefit such as housing benefit, the average council tenant is £8 in credit—they have no arrears at all. For those who are on legacy housing benefit and in arrears, the average figure is less than half the average for those on universal credit.

The Government claim that universal credit is working well. Tell Citizens Advice: 50,000 people a quarter are going to Citizens Advice up and down the country for information and support on universal credit. Tell the food banks: Southwark food bank alone gave out 4,227 three-day emergency parcels last year, including to more than 1,600 children, the single biggest reason being universal credit. The Government also claim that most people get the right support quickly, so everything is hunky-dory. The NAO said that this year alone, more than a quarter of a million people will get payments late. That is completely unacceptable. The Department is ignoring those real problems and making increasingly desperate excuses and outlandish claims about universal credit.
We are here today because the Secretary of State made a false or misleading statement about what the NAO said. Actually, she has claimed multiple times, including this week, that universal credit gets more people into work. The NAO said:

“The Department will never be able to measure whether Universal Credit actually leads to...more people in work, because it cannot isolate the effect”.

It also said:

“Both we, and the Department, doubt it will ever be possible for the Department to measure whether the economic goal of increasing employment has been achieved.”

That is what the NAO said, so enough of the Trumpetopia—enough of blaming, scapegoating and distraction through disinformation administered by a Department that is failing from bottom to top.

2.48 pm

Alex Burghart (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow my colleague from the Work and Pensions Committee, the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle), particularly after the remarks he made at the start of his speech. I very much welcome the offer that the Secretary of State made today to work cross-party to help to improve universal credit. I happen to think that that attitude has been prevalent in the Department for some time. That is what, quite frankly, led to its accepting a number of recommendations that the Committee, headed by my friend, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), made last year. It led to the reforms that we saw in November, which are now being implemented.

I do not want to go over this again, because this is the third time that I have to say this in the past week in the House. However, the NAO report, which raises some important issues, does not take account of the changes that were implemented at the start of the year. It is a fact that test and learn, as implemented by the Department, has allowed the system to evolve in response to reports that our Committee made last year.

This is test and learn in action. It is a sign of a system that is capable of evolving and responding as we find out more about how it works. While there is always room for improvement and there are many things we can do to improve the system—I am particularly pleased to hear the Secretary of State say she will look at repayment periods, and I know the work she is doing on universal support to ensure that people can get out of debt—it is important to have a system that enables those changes to be made, and I take some solace in the fact that that exists.

I have had universal credit in my jobcentre since November. My office is in frequent contact with it, and in my area at least—I can only speak for my area—things are going very well: the work coaches are extremely pleased with the system and the claimants I have spoken to have been extremely pleased with the service they have received.

Today’s motion brings a personal censure against the Secretary of State. The House will remember that the Secretary of State has been in post since the start of the year, since when she has reinstituted housing benefit for 18 to 21-year-olds, introduced new support for kinship carers, discontinued PIP legal appeals and introduced protections for people with severe disability payments. That is what she has done in the past six months. Just say to the House that we are not at our best when we make matters personal, rather than about policy, and it would be better if we did not cross this grubby line again.

2.51 pm

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): It is hard to overstate the rolling catastrophe that is universal credit and the abject misery and hardship that it represents not only to my constituents but to those of many other right hon. and hon. Members. As page 19 of the NAO report demonstrates, the system is so beleaguered that, while the original plan was for more than 7 million households to be on universal credit by now, the latest figures show that just 660,000 households were on it by the end of last year. The system is already six years late and there is no guarantee that it will ever arrive at the destination originally envisaged, yet the NAO estimates that the system has currently cost £2 billion to implement and is costing an astonishing £699 per claim.

The proper response to the huge problems with universal credit in the Department should be a commitment to improve and an acknowledgement of the undoubted weaknesses and design flaws that have been revealed. We have not had enough of that response. We have had ministerial denial and dissembling. Whatever dubious assertions the Minister may make about the merits of the system in response to today’s debate, the lived experience of my constituents in Wallasey contradicts them. It started to be rolled out in Wallasey in November 2017, and many of my constituents have been struggling ever since. As a result, many families have been placed under increasing pressure and hardship through no fault of their own.

Experience demonstrates that food bank usage increases by 30% in areas where there has been a full service roll-out. In Wirral, the increase was 35% in the first five months of 2018, as more and more families were forced to move on to universal credit. In the first five months of this year, 50,000 three-day emergency food packages were given out, nearly 15,000 going to children. In my constituency, the introduction of universal credit was 13% complete in December 2017, yet almost every day my constituency office receives new cases from people struggling with the system.

I have a constituent who suffers from a condition that leads to episodes of multiple seizures. She was attending a medical assessment as part of her claim when she suffered multiple seizures in front of the doctor. Not only was there a lack of understanding and sympathy about her condition; they refused to accept the medical evidence and what they were witnessing and shockingly told her that she had to come back the next day at 9 am to be re-examined. She has still not had her claim processed and is now frightened to leave the house for fear of being accused of being a benefits cheat.

Claimants are being given insufficient advice and guidance from their jobcentre and local advocacy services have been decimated. I have constituents who have been sanctioned and have no other income. We know that this is not working. We have to make it work. It is not working at the moment.
2.54 pm

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): I suspect that everybody in the House became an MP because they wanted to make a difference—I most certainly did, and I know the Secretary of State did too—so I find the motion to be nothing other than an unacceptable personal attack on her. Perhaps President Trump’s visit to the UK this week can serve as a reminder: they go low and we go high.

I have yet to talk to any organisation with deep knowledge of our benefits system past and present that does not agree that universal credit is a vast improvement on legacy systems. Everyone who cares about alleviating poverty and improving the life chances of the vulnerable wants universal credit to succeed. I could look back and say I wish we had had more ministerial stability at the Department, that the roll-out in the last 12 months could have been slower or that the £1.5 billion in the Budget last year could have come a bit sooner; but since she has taken the reins at the DWP the Secretary of State has listened, just as her predecessor did. Deciding not to pursue the court challenges over PIP, and the severe disability payments, which we have heard about today, were both the right things to do. I am confident that when those of us who have constructively assessed the system tell her what more we can do, she will listen.

Let us start with the current system. We need to upgrade universal support to Martini status. Given that just 54% of claimants can enrol for universal credit without assistance, we need to ensure that universal support is available anywhere, everywhere and at any time. This means a full service specification with quality standards that can be monitored. It needs to provide more than was originally envisaged, including debt advice, which should be available through a trusted provider and to every claimant who needs it. I would suggest contracting it out to Citizens Advice, housing associations or some other such organisation.

The universal credit system as a whole needs quality indicators. What does good look like? What payment timeliness are we aiming for? What about accessibility, advanced payments and debt monitoring? Let us think of claimants as valuable clients, as citizens and taxpayers who deserve excellence in their interactions with the DWP. I want us to focus on the most vulnerable claimants—those at risk of ending up in our surgeries and food banks—such as victims of domestic abuse and modern slavery, those with mental health issues and the disabled.

Let us treat them as a special set of customers—platinum customers—and make it our mission to ensure they do not fall through the net. Let us think about fast-tracking them through the system and treating advanced payments as first payments, not loans to be collected back in. Since we pay universal credit in arrears, that advanced payment should be collected right at the end, when, all being well, the customer, with all the positive support of universal credit and the skills and passion of their work coach, has moved into good sustainable employment.

Paul Masterton: My hon. Friend mentions work coaches. I was disappointed that the Opposition spokesperson expressed no gratitude to the incredible men and women all over the country working on the frontline of our jobcentres with some of the most vulnerable people in our society. Does she agree that they deserve our support?

Heidi Allen: Absolutely, and they care deeply. I have spent time with work coaches all over the country in different jobcentres. They are proud of what they do and deserve our support. Working with them, we need to identify every crack in the system and ensure that our most precious customers—our platinum customers—do not slip through them. In that regard, I am pleased that the Chancellor has agreed to keep an eye on the taper rate.

None of my asks so far would incur big financial costs, but there is one we should ask the Chancellor for: we have to release working-age claimants from the benefits freeze. Universal credit can be the most positive and efficient system in the world, but if people cannot afford to live on it, it will not matter a jot. Furthermore, this has to be sorted out before we push the button for managed migration. This is important, because when we do that, about two thirds of the claimants who will move across will be ESA claimants. They are our platinum customers and everything has to be perfect for them before we move them across. I will need to be reassured of that before I can vote for that legislation.

Conservative Members want universal credit to work. It is brilliant that we will be working with Citizens Advice, the Trussell Trust, Save the Children and others as they are desperate to engage positively and collaboratively. Getting universal credit right and, in doing so, helping millions of people in this country—that is a motion worth supporting.

2.58 pm

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): I too want universal credit to work, but yet again the Secretary of State has come to the House, in the face of evidence and feedback from the NAO, CABs, food banks, housing associations, local government and others, and just appears to want to ride it out and brazen it out. That is deeply worrying and disappointing for my constituency because Newport has only had about 10% roll-out so far, and those are the easy cases—newly claimants, single people without children, families with no more than two children. Yes, some people will have managed to navigate universal credit, but, as the NAO report says, for a “substantial minority” that is not the case. We need to address the problem as a matter of urgency before the roll-out reaches the more complicated cases, involving moving people from legacy benefits and people with larger families.

During this limited roll-out, we have also seen the problems documented by the NAO report reflected locally, and alarm bells should be heard. There have been problems with the initial claims: for instance, one family were inadvertently moved to universal credit and had to be returned to legacy benefits. It took 99 days for the lost tax credits to be fully recovered. According to the report, one in five claimants do not receive their full payments on time, and on average those claimants have been paid four weeks late. That means that many people do not receive their full payments for eight or nine weeks—and they are often people with no savings on which to rely. Some of my constituents have to resort to using food banks. One local food bank reports giving out 300 extra parcels every month over and above the
increase that it anticipated. Other constituents do not want the advance payments because they do not want to go into debt, and are borrowing from loan sharks or from family and friends instead.

I agree with all the points that have been made about the online system, but let me add one more. People who have no individual ID, such as a passport or driving licence, now face a longer wait for an appointment before they can get into the system into which the delay is built. Those are often the most vulnerable people, and that too needs to be addressed.

Advice services such as citizens advice bureaux are seeing more and more people, and Newport CAB tells me that most of the problems involve initial claims. Arrears and debt problems do not just go away, as is shown by the Government’s own full service survey. Housing associations and local authorities are picking up the extra costs. Rent arrears alone are costing housing associations in Wales more than £1 million.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the hard-working DWP staff out there. According to a survey conducted by the Public and Commercial Services Union, 80% felt that there were not enough staff to manage the workload. I know that they are doing their best with the tools that they have but they need far more resources.

I hope that the Minister who winds up will adopt a more conciliatory tone. It is not enough to say that the delays can be solved by advance payments, or that it is too early to assess the impacts. The evidence is plain to see in our constituencies. The Government have been forced to change parts of this policy, and it is now time for them to pause and listen. If the roll-out speeds up and takes on the more complicated cases, we will, I fear, see only more debt and hardship among those who need the system to help them into work, or to support them if they cannot work.

Ms Angela Eagle: Does my hon. Friend agree that, while DWP staff are remarkably good at the job they do, they must have the tools they need to do that job, and many are frustrated that they do not have them?

Jessica Morden: I absolutely agree. I believe that they are doing the best they can with the tools that they have been given, but they need far more resources.

I hope that the Minister who winds up will adopt a more conciliatory tone. It is not enough to say that the delays can be solved by advance payments, or that it is too early to assess the impacts. The evidence is plain to see in our constituencies. The Government have been forced to change parts of this policy, and it is now time for them to pause and listen. If the roll-out speeds up and takes on the more complicated cases, we will, I fear, see only more debt and hardship among those who need the system to help them into work, or to support them if they cannot work.

3.2 pm

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Let me start by welcoming my near neighbour and old friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Justin Tomlinson), back to his place on the Front Bench.

Today there was a fantastic opportunity for the Opposition to hold a debate on one of a range of very topical issues, many of which arise this week: the future of NATO, the way forward for the western Balkans, our security partnership with the United States, or the revised economic growth figures and the potential impact on savers and borrowers.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Or the World cup.

Richard Graham: Or, indeed, the World cup. Unfortunately, however, the Opposition chose none of those issues, and have fallen rather than risen to the occasion by tabling a motion containing two censures and a personal attack, in the name of the Leader of the Opposition, in relation to something for which the Secretary of State has already apologised.

I come here today for a straightforward reason: to remind the hon. Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood)—who is not paying a huge amount of attention—that it is a mistake for the Opposition to throw stones from very fragile glass houses. Let me explain why. On 11 October last year, the Leader of the Opposition said, at Parliament’s peak moment, during Prime Minister’s Question Time:

“The last Labour Government lifted a million children out of poverty. Gloucester City Homes has evicted one in eight of all of its tenants because of universal credit. The Prime Minister talks about helping the poorest, but the reality is a very, very different story.”—[Official Report, 11 October 2017; Vol. 629, c. 324.]

Let me remind the House that the reality was indeed a very, very different story. The actual figure was not one in eight—which would have meant 650 out of 5,200 tenants in my constituency—but a total of eight, one of whom had left the property 18 months earlier and another of whom had left the country. That is a very, very different story indeed. It would have been fitting for the Leader of the Opposition to apologise, and to have expressed some form of recognition that he had slandered the city of Gloucester, Gloucester City Homes—which is an excellent housing association—and, indeed, all of us who try to engage in a rational, measured, objective debate on universal credit, which is what we did in the Select Committee when I was on it. My point is that we should avoid these motions of censure, stop criticising people personally, and focus on the facts.

Before I run out of time, let me offer some recommendations to the Secretary of State. First, the trusted partner programme is working very well, and housing associations such as Gloucester City Homes benefit from it. Please may we have more of it for our trusted housing associations? Secondly, the Secretary of State is right to focus on debt, and I should love to know more about why people go on to universal credit with so many debts.

3.5 pm

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I came to the House to stand up for the most vulnerable, and for those who need a better deal from their Government, in Holyrood and in Westminster. Those people are public sector workers, single parents with families, people with disabilities, and refugees who are making new lives for themselves. They are people, including parents, who are doing two or three jobs just to survive, pay the bills and fill the fridge. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral West (Margaret Greenwood) for a spirited defence of working-class people who are dealing with the harsh decisions of a bad Government.

Just last week, we saw the head of the National Audit Office call out the Secretary of State on a number of claims that she had made in response to its recent report on the roll-out of universal credit. It is worth noting that he was forced to send a letter to the Government after the Secretary of State would not sit down to discuss the issue with him. The weeks of a Government who are sitting down with their fingers stuck in their ears. And why are they sticking their fingers in their ears? Because the NAO report was damning. It was
stinging in its clarity about the fact that the Government’s flagship social security reform programme is not meeting the aims that were set out, and there is no evidence that it ever will.

Just last month, the Department for Work and Pensions itself published a survey that showed that 40% of claimants were still experiencing financial difficulties nine months into their claims. In my constituency, 21% of children live in low-income households. North Lanarkshire Council has recognised that people are finding it tough, and have introduced a properly funded free school meals programme. I pay tribute to my colleagues on the council, led by Councillor Frank McNally, for that and for all the work they do to support families. The introduction of free school meals every single day of the year—yes, 365—shows that decisions can be taken to support families who are finding it tough. I also pay tribute to my colleague Elaine Smith MSP, who revealed this week that warrants for council tax arrears in Scotland have soared by 40% in the last five years. As Monica Lennon MSP has said, too many Scots are struggling with the basics.

People in our country, and particularly in Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill, are finding it tough, and we need to think again. I hope that the Government will soon recognise that things are not going as planned—that Tory universal credit is not the answer that they thought it would be; and that it is time to call a halt and think again.

3.8 pm

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): When the Government first announced their intention to implement universal credit, it was past the time when we should have grasped the nettle of welfare reform. The existing system was simply failing claimants. It was difficult to navigate—people missed payments to which they were entitled because of the complexity and the myriad different benefits—and it created perverse incentives that locked people out of work. It was truly time for change.

Universal credit was introduced to do several things. First, it was intended to simplify the complex system of different benefits, allowances and tax credits that had preceded it. Streamlining services will not only make them easier to administer, but, crucially, will make the system much more transparent for the user. That is further reinforced by the Government’s decision to invest £200 million in budgeting and digital support to help claimants, as we heard earlier from the Secretary of State. I am sure nobody ever intended to create the strong disincentives to work which ended up being baked into the previous system; it was simply very difficult to keep track of how many different welfare systems would interact with each other in the real world and over such a long period of time.

Creating a system that makes sure that work pays was the second goal of UC. I hope Members on both sides of the House agree that it was not right that some of the poorest people in our society faced some of the highest de facto marginal tax rates as a result of the previous system. Nobody should have to face a pay cut to move from welfare into work. A good job is about so much more than money; employment boosts our independence, our self-respect and our mental health. All claimants deserve the best possible chance of fulfilling their potential and building a strong, long-lasting career.

I am pleased that the Government have recognised that implementing such sweeping reform is a complex and sensitive task, and have adopted an incremental approach that allows Ministers and civil servants to adjust the roll-out—recalibrate at certain times—based on the feedback on the ground. That stands in sharp contrast to the chaos, which I remember from having worked in consumer affairs in the early 2000s, of the sudden “big bang” of tax credits. It is to the Secretary of State’s credit that she has listened since coming into office and has made so many crucial changes.

To sum up, UC is a fantastic idea and the implementation is coming along—we are getting there. We understand that not everything is perfect, but we are making the effort, and we need Members in all parts of the House to recognise that the system is crucial to moving people from a dependency culture into the world of work, not just for them, but for their families and our society.

3.11 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I want to raise two key issues to do with UC that affect my constituents: first, the associated decisions that compromise the Government’s stated aim of helping more people into work; secondly, some adjustments that my constituents are asking to be made to ensure that the programme is fit for purpose for families with childcare needs.

One of the more reasonable aims of UC is to try to get more people into work, yet the Government seem to fail to account for how decisions taken elsewhere by the DWP will affect the outcomes of the policy itself. Many have talked today about the top-slicing of UC, the bedroom tax, and the changes to disability payments, but in my constituency a particularly damaging development has been the closure of jobcentres. Many of those affected have contacted my office saying they are being pushed ever further into crisis due to the added travel distance and the cost of travelling to the remaining centre in the borough. House of Commons Library figures show that 60% of the legacy benefit claimants in my area were served by the Jobcentre Plus in Kilburn. There is now a significant gap in support for vulnerable individuals; they will miss out on vital employment support as they have little or no funds to pay for that commute. To add insult to injury, these changes were made with little or no prior consultation and, as far as I am aware, there was no equalities impact assessment before they were confirmed.

The closures undermine the Government’s rhetoric about helping people into work. For all the good intentions of DWP Ministers, they are being betrayed by the reality of their own policies on the ground. I hope the Minister in summing up will explain how the DWP will support the local council with the funds and resources necessary to ensure employment support is truly available to this community. The Public and Commercial Services Union and the Kilburn Unemployed Workers Group have long called for proper consultation on what employment support in the area looks like, and I hope the Minister will respond accordingly today.

As the chair of the all-party group on childcare and early education, I am very conscious that this policy will also have consequences for parents across the country, and of course in my constituency. Paola is just one of the single parents from West Hampstead
who have asked that I raise specific concerns about UC today. She has demanded better access to fortnightly payments and for the Government to offer flexibility for those managing fluctuating incomes. Similarly, she has raised concerns over the new job-seeking requirements for parents of three and four-year-old children. Making adjustments on these points would be a huge support for single parents who are self-employed, or who face huge childcare costs, and often both. The pressures on single parents are running in tandem, with many more families claiming UC and having to pay monthly childcare bills up front.

I hope the Minister will address these issues in summing up. If the Secretary of State is truly being honest about wanting to make this work and wanting to work together, she must take into account that fact that there are parents with childcare costs for whom UC is not currently working.

3.14 pm

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq).

When I first saw the motion on the Order Paper I was dismayed by the wording and the personal attack on the Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend. The Member for Tatton (Ms McVeigh). It was very good of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) and the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Neil Coyle) to stand and give their apologies, and I give a heartfelt welcome to that. I hope they will call on their colleagues, particularly the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), to stand in this Chamber and repeat their words, because the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark is absolutely right to say we have more in common when we work together, and we should put that hatred aside once and for all; the hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead are great examples of that.

I want to focus on an aspect of UC that we sometimes do not focus on enough. I come at this from my background in software and systems and technology. The Secretary of State has explained that UC is an agile test and learn system, but what does that really mean? In the words of the jobcentre staff in Redditch, it means that every claimant is an individual and they have support tailored to their unique circumstances. Those circumstances are not static at one point in time; they might change—their income might go up or down, their family situation might change. That is why what we are discussing is so important. The calls to pause UC often unfortunately fail to grasp the nature of an agile test and learn system; if we pause a system, we cannot have that feedback put into the system to improve it. We want the system to be improved in order to be able to improve people’s lives. As my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) has said, this is not just about economics; this is about human potential—people’s human potential to give to their society and to provide for their families, which is what we all want to see.

I have experience of the full service in Redditch: it has been rolled out there. There are always things to improve, and I will focus on one area in the NAO report: will the Department ensure it sets out the goals more clearly and tracks the progress towards them? That is very important in any complex system, which this is.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tatton is a learning and listening Secretary of State. I commend her on the work she has done, and I am sure she will continue to work in this way.

3.17 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Lincoln saw the full roll-out of UC in March. It is about hardship; it is about poverty; it is about debt—that is the reality. This month over 600 claimants in my constituency need to apply to be transferred over to the full service. It is causing havoc and deep concern—it genuinely is. Prolonged delays have set in motion a damaging cycle of debt, rent arrears and even eviction and homelessness. In Lincoln, arrears in 264 council houses total over £80,000 of debt since UC was rolled out. My constituents who are forced to wait for UC payments are unable to cope with household budgeting—they just cannot do it on that kind of income—and their physical and mental wellbeing is affected as bills and debts pile up.

We shall take as an example what has happened to Anna, one of my constituents. Anna has been passed from pillar to post as she has tried to navigate through slow and complex bureaucracy. The delay in receiving her payment has forced her to sell everything she can, including her car. Despite help from my office and Lincoln’s Labour-led city council, Anna has fallen into arrears and has been understandably anxious regarding the lack of progress in her case; even my staff member who supported her got really upset about it—the House has to listen to this.

The chaotic roll-out of universal credit means that thousands of people like Anna are facing a nightmarish situation. We are not making it up. In my constituency, I have supported people who are either waiting for or receiving universal credit. They cannot even afford to feed themselves and their families and they have to rely on food banks to survive. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody who works in Lincoln’s food banks supporting those people. They are doing a tremendous job against the odds.

The Secretary of State has made three inaccurate statements, but she has apologised for only one of them. I might be new here, but by my reckoning that still leaves two that have not been apologised for. There has been a lot of talk today about working together. May I appeal to the Secretary of State to pause and fix universal credit, and to listen to what we are saying before more families are plunged into debt and poverty and risk suffering the indignity of using food banks?

3.20 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): This is a petty and mean motion. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is doing a first-class job, and I have only the utmost respect for her and for what she is doing. There is no more passionate an advocate for the principle of work and the eradication of poverty than my right hon. Friend. Her team are attentive, listening and committed to the task, which is to ensure that people are always better off in work than on benefits.
We have had full service universal credit in Stirling for over a year, and I would like to share some observations and suggestions based on our experience. First, is there a way—I think there might have been a suggestion earlier that there is—in which the DWP could extend the concept of trusted partner status to organisations such as Citizens Advice? That would allow Citizens Advice volunteer advisers to have access to named DWP contacts in order to support the resolution of client queries, which would go a long way to making things simpler and resolving things quickly. The second point is on the need to secure mental health training for DWP staff dealing with the migration of legacy benefits. The legacy benefits issue has been well documented, and with more vulnerable clients coming into the system, we need to ensure that DWP staff are well supported when supporting their clients.

Thirdly, there needs to be increased decision-making discretion at local level on reassessment, and particularly on mandatory reconsideration. When clients are well known to the DWP, it is my view that the mandatory reconsideration process is redundant. More than 90% of medical assessment decisions are upheld at that stage, but three quarters are then overturned on appeal. Giving more discretion to local staff on this matter would make the system more efficient and make better use of the working knowledge that staff have of their face-to-face clients.

My fourth point relates to an anomaly in universal credit deductions. When the DWP makes a deduction from a payment, that might not be the only deduction that is coming off that payment. There might also be court deductions or deductions from the local authority. This can often take claimants below the minimum payment level and leave them without anything to live on. That is a real-life experience.

My final point relates to women’s refuges. When a woman goes into a refuge, only one benefit should stop, on. That is a real-life experience. This can often take claimants below the minimum court deductions or deductions from the local authority. When the DWP makes a deduction from a payment, that might not be the only deduction that is coming off that payment. There might also be court deductions or deductions from the local authority. This can often take claimants below the minimum payment level and leave them without anything to live on. That is a real-life experience.

Heidi Allen: Does my hon. Friend agree that those sorts of women are the platinum customers that I am talking about? They are the ones who need to be fast-tracked through the system and to have a bespoke work coach with them.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely. The test of this system is how we take care of the most vulnerable people that are touched by it. That point is well accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and her team.

Those are the five points that I wanted to make, and I would like to see some movement on them, to help to continue to roll out a fair and improved system that meets the promise of encouraging work and also protects the most vulnerable in society. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

3.23 pm

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I am slightly concerned that the Secretary of State feels that highlighting the fact that it appears that the House has been misled is now turning into a personal attack, because that is certainly not my intention. My intention is to raise awareness of what is really going on in our constituencies and what people are coming up against. I understand that this is a censure motion, but that is because we would like a vote on it, and the reason why I think that our constituents are affected by this. It is not all goodness and light and a bed of roses with people doing well.

The hon. Member for Redditch (Rachel Maclean) talked about “test and learn”. I have no issue with that, but we need to learn from the tests. If we roll out a test and get negative feedback, we need to pause and fix it, and then carry on. We should not continue with business as usual when we know from the test that certain aspects are failing. For example, we know that there is a negative impact on our disabled constituents. They are not a forgotten class; they are as important as everyone else. We are asking for a review of the policy. If universal credit has faults, let us fix them rather than rolling out a faulty system.

Bim Afolami: I like the tone of the hon. Lady’s remarks, but does she accept that her moderate tone does not reflect the motion on the Order Paper? Does she agree that arguing about technical tweaks relating to universal credit is not quite what the Labour party is doing today?

Fiona Onasanya: I thank the hon. Gentleman. Gentleman for his intervention, but I do not accept his comments. I am seeking to convey my points in this tone because people are at the centre of this discussion. This is not about politics that are devoid of compassion. That would make this place just a debating chamber, and that is not what it is about. We are seeking to help the individuals who need this assistance. People who need help are being told, “We have weighed everything up and we think this is the minimum you need to get by, but we are going to hold that back. We are going to sanction you.” One of my constituents, who is called Holly, contacted the DWP about what she perceived to be an overpayment. The DWP said, “No, there’s no overpayment. You can continue. The money is yours.” It then decided that there had been an overpayment. She has now been sanctioned and is not entitled to any money until she has repaid £1,500. These are the people we are here to talk about.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend be surprised to learn that there is a glitch in the system that seems to be putting people into debt? Someone in my constituency has been able to apply for advance payment seven times; because of that glitch, they now have £1,700 of arrears. Is that what the system was designed to do?

Fiona Onasanya: I do not believe that that is what the system was meant to do. That is evidently a glitch that needs to be rectified. This goes back to what I was saying about test and learn. If we can see that there is a problem like that, why would we not pause and fix it before continuing the roll-out? It is almost like still driving a vehicle with a punctured tyre—we are running on the rim and the wheel is being damaged, but we keep on going. We need to pause and say, “Hold on, we’ve been made aware of this. We are not just hearing about these problems but listening, and this is what we are going to do. We are going to pause this, and then we will roll it out. That will be more effective.”
Seeking to help people into work is a good thing, not a negative thing, and we want to give people a hand up, not a handout. However, my worry is that we are not properly serving many of the people we are here to serve if we do not stop and say, “Hold on a minute. We hear what you are saying and we are listening.” We should be listening to the disabled individuals who are not getting the money to which they are entitled. We should be listening to the people who find themselves sanctioned and have to live hand to mouth, or to wait weeks to get more money after their electricity has run out. We should say, “We’re listening to that and we don’t want you to be in that position.” No one cares how much we know until they know how much we care. Let us pause the roll-out and fix this.

3.29 pm

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): I want to talk about three areas: the first relates to the motion and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State; the second is the experience in Somerset, where some of the first 15 councils to transition to universal credit nearly two years ago are located; and the third is about what might be left to do.

The speech of the hon. Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) was one of the more constructive to come from the Opposition Benches, but it is impossible to say that this is not a personal motion that confuses real issues around the roll-out of universal credit with an attack on the Secretary of State. I was in the House last week when she did apologise, and she has done the right thing since she initially spoke incorrectly.

The two district councils in my constituency, Sedgemoor District Council and Mendip District Council, transitioned to universal credit on 25 May 2016 and 27 July 2016 respectively, so the Wells constituency has a lot of experience of universal credit. To be honest, when it first arrived, that experience was not very good at all. A report produced by Sedgemoor District Council in January 2017, after about seven months of dealing with universal credit, said all the things that Opposition Members are saying now. People were being left without money for too long, which was reflected in my case load, and an awful lot of people came to see me for help. Local food banks said to me exactly what they have said to other colleagues and in the media: they were seeing a real uptick in referrals.

I would therefore never argue that the roll-out of universal credit has been smooth and that everything has gone swimmingly. However, now that we are two years into the process of Wells residents transferring to universal credit, things have massively improved. People are now transitioning much more smoothly. The number of people seeking my help because they have experienced difficulties has reduced significantly. Jobcentre Plus staff tell me that they see great merit in universal credit and think that it is achieving all the things that it should achieve to help people into work.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a constructive, sensible point. Does he agree that the principle of universal credit must always be that it will pay to get people into work and to simplify what was an overcomplicated and over-bureaucratic system?

3.33 pm

Matt Rodda (Reading East) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate and to present the concerns of many of my constituents, whom this failed public policy is supposed to help. The root of the problem for many is that applications are processed solely online. That causes enormous problems for people who are digitally excluded, those who do not have a smartphone or a computer at home, and those for whom English is a second language. The support provided by the DWP is inadequate and jobcentres are simply not set up to provide the necessary level of IT support. The National Audit Office report supports that view, and the Department’s own survey found that nearly half of claimants were unable to make a claim online unassisted and a fifth of claims fail at an early stage because claimants are not able to navigate the online system.

I am grateful for the work of my constituency staff and several local support and advice organisations that work tirelessly to plug the shortfall and help to process claims in the absence of adequate DWP support. Without those organisations, to which I pay tribute—they include Reading citizens advice bureau, Woodley citizens advice bureau, Reading community welfare rights unit and CommuniCare—hundreds of people would be falling through the cracks. I visited one of those organisations recently and, in the bright sunshine, I was shocked to find that more than 10 people were queuing at 9 o’clock on a Monday morning. They were waiting in line, desperate for help. This simply is not good enough.

I urge the Secretary of State and my Reading colleague, the Minister for Employment, to see these problems for themselves and pause to fix the roll-out of universal credit.

3.35 pm

Kirstene Hair (Angus) (Con): As we have heard, universal credit replaces a complex web of payments with a single monthly sum. Not only that but it actively encourages people to work by ensuring they do not end up worse off by taking up part-time work.

Under the previous Labour system, people could lose up to £9 of every extra £10 they earned. We are talking about apologies, and I cannot understand why the Labour party will not apologise for punishing people who wanted to work and to provide for their family.
About 60% of those in work who are receiving universal credit want to increase their hours. Figures show an overall increase in earnings of £600 and a fall in the proportion of those making less than £10,000. That is the reality, not the scaremongering from Opposition Members, which only creates anxiety among those who need the very help that universal credit provides.

One example of that scaremongering is the food bank survey, which has been mentioned a number of times in this debate. The sample for that survey was 0.04% of those on universal credit, and it was carried out prior to the changes that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has implemented. That is not a true reflection of the picture throughout the United Kingdom.

I have heard the concerns expressed by Members, the devolved Administrations and third parties such as charities about the roll-out of universal credit, which is why, both before and since the roll-out began, I have liaised closely with the DWP and jobcentre staff in my Angus constituency.

When I visited the jobcentre in Arbroath earlier this year, its staff made it clear to me that universal credit is a vast improvement on the previous chaos of various benefit payments, which could leave people confused. When there have been occasional issues in transferring constituents from the old system to the new, I have been struck by the DWP’s willingness to listen and to correct errors. In fact, the National Audit Office’s report confirmed my local experience by observing good relationships between work coaches and claimants, which I hope the Opposition will welcome. Indeed, I will return to my jobcentre throughout the summer months because we fix things by learning what the issues are and ensuring that we can help our constituents.

No national roll-out is ever straightforward, and it is always challenging to bring together a vast array of benefits into a single system, but the benefits of universal credit are clear: more people in work, and more people on the lowest incomes with more money in their pockets. That is why I am here to oppose the Opposition’s motion.

3.37 pm

Graham Morris (Easington) (Lab): I am grateful to be able to speak in this important debate. I fully understand why tempers are high, given the terrible impact that universal credit has had. Ministers’ assurances about mitigating the impact of universal credit do not square with many people’s experience. Indeed, the Department’s own surveys have found that 40% of claimants are experiencing financial difficulties, that 25% cannot make an online claim—I think the rate is higher in Easington—and that 20%, or one in five, are not paid in full on time. Despite the Secretary of State’s assurances, the Department cannot measure the exact number of additional people in employment as a direct result of universal credit.

In my limited time, I must thank the charities, advice groups and campaigners who are supporting my constituents to get by on universal credit. In particular, I thank the East Durham Trust’s Malcolm Fallow, its excellent team of full-time support workers and its exceptional volunteers. Without their advocacy, and benefit and debt advice, many families in my constituency would not have a roof over their heads, or electricity and gas on the meter. Through the East Durham Trust food bank, people have been able to put food on the table to feed their family.

Thousands of people will be waiting for health assessments for UC or ESA, so I have some practical advice, as the Secretary of State said she wanted some suggestions. While the current system remains, claimants must take steps to protect themselves. In a written answer I received on 28 March from the Minister for Disabled People, I was advised:

“Anyone who is called for a work capability assessment as part of their claim for Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit, receives an information leaflet about the assessment process. This leaflet includes details of how they can request that their assessment is recorded.”

I would advise anyone undergoing an assessment to get it recorded. I have dealt with cases where individuals have gone from zero points to 15 points, and without the recording it would not have been possible to challenge the original decision. In addition, the health assessor commissioned by the Department should provide recording equipment and answer any questions that a person has. Unfortunately, although the Department claims to be digital by default, claimants are not aware that the results of the PIP assessment have to provide their own recording equipment. That is absolutely ridiculous. I am in little doubt that that is a deliberate barrier to prevent people making claims. I urge Members to support the motion.

3.40 pm

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): In a week when chaos reigns in this Government, it seems only fitting that we talk about the policy most in chaos—universal credit. I must say to the Secretary of State that if one of my constituents went into Shettleston jobcentre and lied to their work coach, they would find that they had been sanctioned and the Government would then come down on them like a ton of bricks. The hon. Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) talked about us recognising work coaches, but my problem is not with them—they do a fantastic job—but with the ideology that comes from the Department for Work and Pensions, which is taken forward by the work coaches on behalf of the Government.

The sheer misery of full UC roll-out is due to be unleashed in Glasgow later this year, so my message to the Secretary of State today could not be clearer: halt the roll-out of UC in Glasgow and fix it now. This callous Tory Government cannot sit idly by and watch as UC continues to cause social destruction within our communities. The evidence from charities, stakeholders and constituents is overwhelming: universal credit is pushing people into crisis, and crisis appears to be the new normal. Indeed, under this Government, food banks appear to be the new normal. Data from the Trussell Trust shows that where full UC roll-out is in place, the food banks have seen an average increase in usage of 42%. Glasgow North East food bank in my constituency is already at breaking point, and that is before this Government have even moved to full UC roll-out.

I want to briefly turn to the issue of housing and the impact that UC has on our housing associations. I am incredibly fortunate to have a strong network of small, local housing associations in my constituency—my biggest challenge is getting round to visit them all. If one message they give me is crystal clear, it is that UC is
pushing tenants into rent arrears and putting financial pressure on our housing associations. I have repeatedly invited the Minister for Employment to come to my constituency to see and hear at first hand the concerns of housing associations in Greater Easterhouse about full UC roll-out. I am told that he is coming to Scotland soon, and I wonder if he might even be willing, when he sums up, to put on record when he will be coming to Easterhouse to speak to the Easterhouse Housing and Regeneration Alliance and listen to its concerns. I am sure he does take them seriously.

I am conscious that colleagues want to speak and as I do not want to be a tadger by taking up too much time, I would just say that UC’s credibility lies in tatters, as does the Secretary of State’s reputation, so she should do the right thing and resign.

3.46 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It has been interesting to hear Government Members talk about tweaking, making adjustments and listening and so forth, because universal credit is nothing new for some people. My constituency has been suffering from it for more than five years, from pilot through to full service roll-out. I was leader of Highland Council when the pilot was unveiled, and we noticed the problems, particularly with housing, right away. We wrote letters to the DWP and spoke to Ministers in meetings, telling them of the problems. We made suggestions and cajoled and pleaded with them to listen to us.

I was looking back and found that since 2015 I have spoken in 35 debates about universal credit, asked dozens of oral and written questions about it and signed 13 different early-day motions on it. I led the Scottish National party Opposition day debate on universal credit, in addition to securing two Adjournment debates on the impact it has had on my constituents—the pain and suffering it has caused and its impact on disabled people and the low-waged. Unfortunately, not everyone has sought help because some people have not known how to do it, but those who have come for help have seen extraordinary difficulties.

I invited all Government MPs to come to a summit in Inverness and hear at first hand from the agencies and the people involved about the pain that they were going through, but that was ignored. After this period, I have come to the conclusion that the Government do not want to listen. They are determined to make sure that austerity falls on the backs of the low-waged and the disabled—those people who are most vulnerable in our society.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): My hon. Friend is right that the Government clearly have not listened. Did the changes that the Secretary of State brags about not come about only because the Government were defeated in the High Court when they were infringing people’s human rights?

Drew Hendry: I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. As I have said, we have been through the pilot and the pain of live service to the absolutely crushing delivery of full service. Resources are stretched; the jobcentre is open seven days a week; the Highland Council welfare team is stretched to the limit; staff at our constituency office are working outside hours to try to cope with the excess of inquiries; and the citizens advice bureau is under extreme pressure. All have struggled with universal credit. The Highland Council housing team has tried desperately to deal with a broken landlord system, and Highland Council rent arrears are now in the millions of pounds.

We have seen evictions, people unable to feed and clothe their children, families made destitute and poverty driving people into mental health difficulties. What is
the Government’s response: “You’re wrong. They’re wrong. It’s not happening. You’re scaremongering.” Well, that is the reality for people on universal credit: that is what is happening to them. People are suffering unimaginable hardship at the hands of this Government’s policies, and it has changed and damaged our community.

Earlier, the Secretary of State said that universal credit makes people more economically secure in life. Let me tell that to John who had 42p to last a fortnight, or to Gavin who was given £60 for a £175 rental bill. He had nothing else; he was in debt already. He cannot even eat, let alone turn on the power or do anything else. What about Ian and his two-year-old who had to rely on food banks and go for days without electricity? A woman from Grantown-on-Spey had to travel to Inverness to hand in childcare vouchers. It was an hour and a half each way on public transport—three hours on a bus—and the jobcentre then lost her claim. What do we say to those who are terminally ill who are asked to report to work coaches? This affects people. More and more people are falling into poverty. Food banks are becoming a necessity to report to work coaches? 

3.51 pm

Mike Amesbury (Weaver Vale) (Lab): Despite being new at the Dispatch Box, I am under no illusion about the fact that people inside and outside this Chamber may shortly have plans to watch something other than my response to today’s debate. I will seek to respond in a manner that is timely, but that also does justice to the many thousands of people for whom the realities of universal credit are more than just a game—they are an everyday injustice.

Regardless of the result tonight—and I wish my team England well—we can all appreciate the manner in which Gareth Southgate has taken over an underperforming team and turned it around. If only those in charge at the DWP had a similar approach to leadership and accountability. Over the past week, we have seen a Secretary of State who, when called on to show leadership and humility, chose to lecture rather than to listen, to sow division rather than to build consensus and refuse to make a thorough apology at every point.

In fact, the Secretary of State’s attempts to explain away a number of misinterpretations of the National Audit Office facts were so fantastical that they reminded me of an episode of the children’s programme “Jackanory” or of Trumpisms, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) would phrase them. I am talking about a world where pause and slow are fast; where failure is success; and where sign-off is tune out, forget and denial. It is a place where the trusted and respected National Audit Office, armed with empirical data and facts to give good counsel, is almost dismissed as an agent of fake news.

We have the evidence and facts that were signed off by the DWP on 8 June. Here are some of the facts: 113,000 claimants paid late and two thirds of disabled people with limited capacity to work not paid on time. Then there is the continual claim, well documented by Members in the House, that 200,000 people have been put into work, which is not evidenced and not proven.

The contributions today show just how important it is that this Government radically fix and pause universal credit. We are not short of evidence that the current system is failing. The current impact of the roll-out of universal credit has united housing associations across the UK. They are clear that this policy is causing debt, suffering and hardship for the families they house. The Child Poverty Action Group’s early warning system is pointing towards what it says is likely to be a systemic problem.

The Secretary of State may have struggled to accept the NAO’s criticism last week in its unprecedented open letter, but there can be no room for misinterpreting what we have heard today from many MPs across the Chamber: tale after tale of delays, refusals and mistakes, causing suffering, hardship and misery to the very people this policy is supposed to support.

Last week, the Secretary of State went to great lengths to defend this policy, by explaining how universal credit must be judged on the most up-to-date information. Well, it was, and the Department signed it off. The cases and experiences that have been raised today show what is happening here, out there and now. We are talking about real lives, real time and real people—not crocodile tears. It is time to stop. It time to pause. It is time to fix it.

3.55 pm

The Minister for Employment (Alok Sharma): I believe that each of us in this House, whatever our political persuasion, came into politics to help build a fairer society. Indeed, that sense of fairness is part of the very DNA of the British people, and the desire for fairness extends to our welfare system—a system where we support the vulnerable, those looking to get into work and those wanting to increase their hours. That is precisely what universal credit does. It takes a complicated benefits system and simplifies it. Under this system, the claimant is provided with one-to-one support for the first time by their work coach. This support is making a real difference to progress into employment and is increasing people’s earnings.

We have published research that shows that, once people are on universal credit, they get into work fast and stay in work longer and that they will be earning more. Just last month, we published a survey that showed that the percentage of those in employment almost doubles between the point of making the claim and nine months into universal credit. For every extra hour worked, people get to keep more of their own money. Under universal credit, work absolutely pays.

The Opposition have said that we are ploughing ahead with the universal credit roll-out. This argument simply does not hold water. We are listening, learning and improving, getting the delivery of universal credit right, with a roll-out taking place at a measured rate. Let me give an example. In the autumn Budget, we announced a £1.5 billion package of extra support for claimants. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has set out precisely what was in that package. We listened; we acted; and we helped claimants.

Several hon. Members rose—
Alok Sharma: I will not give way.

What did the Opposition do? They cynically voted against the regulations that allowed the £1.5 billion of support to be made available to claimants. I get that the Opposition are there to oppose, but that should not be at the cost of helping the very people they claim to represent. Opposition Members have raised individual cases of claimants who have been suffering hardship. How many of those hon. Members have looked those individual claimants in the eye and explained why they voted to deny them the help and support that they needed? [Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. The Minister has listened to all the questions and is now answering them, so he should not be shouted at by hon. Members on either side of the House.

Alok Sharma: Let us talk about the help that the work coaches are giving. The NAO report says:

“A survey of live service claimants found that claimant satisfaction levels were similar to those on legacy benefits and in our visits to jobcentres we observed good relationships between work coaches and claimants.”

The support is available, and it is working and helping people to get into work.

Neil Coyle rose—

David Linden: Will the Minister give way?

Alok Sharma: No, I will not give way.

Thanks to the policies of this Conservative Government, we are at record levels of employment. Once universal credit is fully rolled out, we will support another 200,000 people into work. The tone and the wording of Labour’s motion today has been disappointing and, frankly, ill-judged.

At the cost of helping the very people they claim to represent, Opposition Members are there to oppose, but that should not be at the cost of helping the very people they claim to represent. Opposition Members have raised individual cases of claimants who have been suffering hardship. How many of those hon. Members have looked those individual claimants in the eye and explained why they voted to deny them the help and support that they needed?

Question put.

The House divided: Ayes 268, Noes 305.

Division No. 207] [4 pm

**AYES**

Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniacci, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bardell, Hannah
Brabin, Tracy
Bradrashaw, rh Mr Ben
Brake, rh Tom
Brock, Deidre
Brown, Alan
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Cameron, Dr Lisa
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Douglas
Chapman, Jenny
Charalambous, Bambos
Cherry, Joanna
Cocker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Cowan, Ronnie
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cuddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cummins, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
Davey, rh Sir Edward
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint
De Cordova, Marsha
De Piero, Gloria
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Dame Louise
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Field, rh Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Friith, James
Furness, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gibson, Patricia
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Godsiff, Mr Roger
Goodman, Helen
Grady, Patrick
Gray, Neil
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hendry, Drew
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jarvis, Dan
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Graham P.
Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
 Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Afzal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lee, Karen
Leslie, Mr Chris
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewis, Clive
Linden, David
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian C.
Lynch, Holly
MacNeil, Angus Brendan
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Malhotra, Seema
Mann, John
Marsden, Gordon
The Secretary of State’s Handling of Universal Credit

11 JULY 2018

The Secretary of State’s Handling of Universal Credit

Tellers for the Ayes:
Vicky Foxcroft and Thangam Debbonaire

NOES

Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, Ben
Bradley, rh Karen
Brady, Sir Graham
Braverman, Suella
Breer, Jack
Bridge, Andrew
Brine, Steve
Brooks, Sir James
Bruce, Fiona
Buckland, Robert
Burghart, Alex
Burns, Conor
Burt, rh Alistair
Cairns, rh Alun
Cartlidge, James
Cash, Sir William
Caulfield, Maria
Chalk, Alex
Chihiht, Rehman
Chope, Sir Christopher
Churchill, Jo
Clark, Colin
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, Mr Kenneth
Clarke, Mr Simon
Cleverty, James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Coffey, Dr Therese
Collins, Damian
Costa, Alberto
Courts, Robert
Cox, Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, rh Stephen
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Chris
Davies, David T. C.
Davies, Glyn
Davies, Mims
Davies, Philip
Dinenage, Caroline
Djungle, Mr Jonathan
Docherty, Leo
Donels, rh Nigel
Donelan, Michelle
Dorries, Ms Nadine
Double, Steve
Dowden, Oliver
Doyles-Jackie, Drax, Richard
Duddridge, James
Dugdall, David
Duncan, rh Sir Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellwood, rh Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Mr Nigel
Evennett, rh Sir David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, rh Sir Michael
Field, rh Mark
Foster, Kevin
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Frazier, Lucy
Fream, George
Freer, Mike
Fysh, Mr Marcus
Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, Mark
Gauke, rh Mr David
Ghani, Ms Nusrat
Gibb, rh Nick
Gillan, rh Dame Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, rh Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Luke
Graham, Richard
Grant, Bill
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Chris
Green, rh Damian
Greening, rh Justine
Grieve, rh Mr Dominic
Griffiths, Andrew
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hair, Kirstene
Hafon, rh Robert
Hall, Luke
Hammond, Mr rh Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, rh Matt
Hands, rh Greg
Harper, rh Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Harrison, Trudy
Hart, Simon
Hayes, rh Mr John
Heald, rh Sir Oliver
Heappey, James
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Heaton-Jones, Peter
Henderson, Gordon
Herbert, rh Nick
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Hollingbery, George
Hollinrake, Kevin
Hollobose, Mr Philip
Holloway, Adam
Howell, John
Huddleston, Nigel
Hughes, Eddie
Hurd, rh Mr Nick
Jack, Mr Alister
James, Margot
Javid, rh Sajid
Jayawardena, Mr Ranil
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Jenkyns, Andrea
Jennick, Robert
Johnson, rh Boris
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, rh Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Keegan, Gillian
Kennedy, Seema
Kerr, Stephen
Knight, rh Sir Greg
Knight, Julian
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamont, John
The Secretary of State’s Handling of Universal Credit

Defence Industry and Shipbuilding

4.16 pm

Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House recognises the important contribution of the defence industry to the UK; calls on the Government to support the UK defence industry by taking into account the economic and employment benefits to the UK when awarding contracts and to publish a full, overarching defence industrial strategy; and further calls on the Government to make the competition for the Fleet Solid Support ships contract a UK-only competition to maximise the return on that contract.

Today could be a significant step forward for things coming home. Of course, I am talking about the contract for the fleet solid support ships. As a proud island nation, the UK shipbuilding industry is vital for our prosperity and defence—a message that workers’ representatives from the shipyards spelled out loudly and clearly to Members yesterday. The industry makes a substantial economic contribution, directly employing some 23,000 people and contributing £1.7 billion a year to the UK economy.

Throughout our history and to the present day, the industry has supplied our Royal Navy with the ships that it requires, thereby playing a crucial role in the defence of these islands. Our ships contribute to many NATO and EU missions, including Operation Atalanta, which combats piracy in the gulf of Aden and off the horn of Africa, and they were vital in the humanitarian relief efforts following last year’s hurricanes in the Caribbean.

In the light of events this week, I will not suggest which ship the Government most closely resemble, but the phrase “rearranging the deckchairs” comes to mind. I know that Members on both sides of the House want the industry to thrive, and the Government have an important role to play in that regard. I was disappointed to hear in Defence questions on Monday that the Secretary of State did not confirm that he will agree.

In the light of events this week, I will not suggest which ship the Government most closely resemble, but the phrase “rearranging the deckchairs” comes to mind. I know that Members on both sides of the House want the industry to thrive, and the Government have an important role to play in that regard. I was disappointed to hear in Defence questions on Monday that the Secretary of State did not confirm that he will agree.

Nia Griffith: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his excellent intervention.

I hope that the delay will allow Ministers to reflect on the overwhelming case for an active defence industrial strategy that recognises the immense value of building in Britain and takes a longer term view of the orders that the Government will place, giving industry the confidence to invest in the UK and to plan for a steady stream of work.

Long-term planning is vital, not just for the prime contractors but for the supply chain companies and foundation industries such as the steel industry. It gives them the time to gear up to fulfil orders, and the certainty that they need to justify additional investment. A clear strategy needs to balance getting the very best
value for the taxpayer—a crucial consideration, especially when the defence budget is under such strain—with the needs of our armed forces and defences. This would allow us to defend sovereign capabilities, support UK manufacturing and continue to develop the highly skilled jobs and apprenticeships that allow us to compete on the global stage. Research and development must be at the heart of any industrial strategy, promoting links with our universities and technical colleges. We should recognise the need to plan for the skill sets we will need in the future, and to inspire our young people, both girls and boys, with the challenge and excitement of pursuing a career in our world industry.

We have had the national shipbuilding strategy and the combat air strategy is being developed, so rather than just the defence industrial refresh it would make perfect sense for the Government to come forward with an overarching and far-reaching defence industrial strategy that would give industry the certainty it requires.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I do not know whether my hon. Friend has noticed, but Rolls-Royce is in the market to sell off its industrial marine division—the power generation division. Nobody knows yet who is likely to buy it, but it is likely that once again our defence is going to be manufactured abroad instead of being protected in this country.

Nia Griffith: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the need for certainty and long-term planning, so we can give business the confidence to invest here.

As well as ensuring that our armed forces have the very best equipment, a core objective of our defence industrial strategy should be to promote our national prosperity. We can only do that properly if we factor in the true value of defence contracts to the UK economy. Buying British is not just about the basic fact that a UK-based company will pay UK tax; it is also about the broader economic and social benefits, and the value of the skills and apprenticeships that the industry creates.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Is it not the case that if the fleet solid support ships were built in the UK, 20% of that cost could be recovered by the workers working on those ships paying tax and national insurance?

Nia Griffith: Indeed—at least that amount.

Reports by Oxford Economics highlight that the UK defence industry has an output multiplier of 2.3, meaning that £100 million in UK industry generates some £230 million to the UK economy. Its reports also highlight that each additional job created in the manufacturing element of the defence industry results in a further 1.8 jobs being created in the wider economy.

At present, the Government do not routinely factor in these wider socioeconomic values when making a procurement decision. We on the Labour Benches believe that to be a serious mistake. It is particularly anomalous when companies that bid with the Ministry of Defence are quite used to having to set out the socioeconomic value of contracts when bidding with Governments of other countries. Labour is committed to expanding the definition of good value to include wider employment, industrial or economic factors when making procurement decisions.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I am listening very attentively to what the hon. Lady is saying. I am sure she will be aware that in March this year HM Treasury published, after a seven year review, a new definition of managing public money, which specifically allows, under UK procurement rules, for the concept of social value to be taken into account. She is therefore asking the Government to do something they have already decided to.

Nia Griffith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention and I congratulate him on his excellent report, which he presented on Monday. I note that in it he recommends that UK prosperity should be taken into account in all major procurement decisions. I welcome that statement.

Mr Kevin Jones (North Durham) (Lab): The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) raises an interesting point, but the issue is not so much about the policy as about the implementation of it. That is what the Treasury and others have got to start doing.

Nia Griffith: Indeed. When we speak to defence contractors, we find it is a sad fact that they are not being required to put those details into the bids they make. We very much hope to see that change. I hope that this is an urgent step on that way. The approach has been endorsed by the Defence Committee and has received the support of the trade body, ADS, as well as the defence trade unions such as Unite, GMB and Prospect.

The contract for the fleet solid support ships would bring immense value to this country if it were awarded to a UK bidder. Our carriers, frigates and destroyers will, of course, always be built in the UK, but with ships such as the fleet solid support vessels, the Government have a choice to make, and Labour Members believe that they are making the wrong one by choosing to put this order out to international competition. I know that some in the Conservative party like to blame everything on the European Union, but the fact is that the Government would be able to procure these ships in the UK under existing EU law, and there are compelling reasons for doing so. The GMB trade union has estimated that the ships would support 6,700 jobs if they were built in UK yards and up to £285 million of the £800 million potential UK spend would be returned to the Treasury through taxation.

The case for buying British is clear, and it would be a betrayal of our UK workers if this contract were allowed to go overseas, so we need to question what is really driving Ministers to put this out to overseas bidders. Perhaps it is the view that there will be a lower price tag for the MOD. We all want to get the best value for money, and we are aware of the difficulties that the MOD is having in balancing its budget, but this short-sighted, narrow, silo mentality about what might look good on the MOD’s balance sheet ignores both the benefits to the UK economy of building the ships in Britain and the costs of not doing so. We as taxpayers all want to see value for our money, and taxpayers up and down the country would far rather see that money spent on supporting skilled jobs for workers here in the UK than see it spent abroad, knowing that some 30% of the money spent on wages will come back directly to the
Treasury as taxation, and that the spending power of those workers and their families will sustain local businesses in their communities.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I am very sympathetic to the case that the hon. Lady is making, but the consequence of going down the route that she recommends, and which I am inclined to support, is that the black hole in the defence equipment budget will become even greater. If we accept that there needs to be an uplift in the defence budget to be able to make this sort of investment and get the long-term gains that she describes, will she confirm that her party’s policy is to support an increase in the defence budget?

Nia Griffith: As I just outlined, it is extremely important that we take into account the way that the money can be brought back into the Treasury, and I very much hope that the right hon. Gentleman’s message will be well understood by Government Front Benchers.

I will make a bit of progress. As taxpayers, we all want to see value for our money, but we recognise the consequences if we do not spend the money in the UK—the immediate impact on workers and their families, who are unemployed or able only to find much lower-paid work, leaving them and their families much more reliant on social security payments and tax credits. All that is a cost to the taxpayer and, sadly, there are all too often the hidden costs of the increased risk of mental health problems and family break-up. While workers and their families will take the hardest hit, the wider consequences will be far-reaching and long term. Shipyards will close. We will lose a skilled workforce and a generation of apprentices.

If UK companies do not win these contracts, they will have less money to spend on research and development, and that bodes ill for the future. We have to stay ahead in this game to stay in the game. We know that UK-based companies are interested in putting in a bid, but they will be less inclined to do so if they think that this order will simply be handed overseas, as happened with the MARS—Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability—tankers. Bidding is a lengthy and expensive process, and companies understandably do not want to take that risk if there is no chance that they will succeed. Awarding this contract to an overseas manufacturer would be particularly galling when we note the subsidies, both direct and indirect, that benefit many foreign yards.

To those who argue that UK companies should simply compete on a level playing field with international bidders, I say that the point is that currently the field is simply not level. For example, the South Korean shipbuilding industry has been the subject of a great deal of criticism for the level of state aid it receives. Shipbuilding is a significant element of the country’s economy, and state-run lenders have injected billions of dollars into the industry. The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions has found that German yards benefit from targeted research and development, from funds for redeveloping and upgrading yards and from regional development funding, while significant potential bidders in Italy, France and Spain are owned in whole or part by their respective Governments. Rather than allowing this valuable contract to disappear overseas, the Government should do the right thing and put UK yards and workers first.

Of course, in this global marketplace, I recognise that not every contract can or should be delivered in the UK, and where we buy from abroad or work in collaboration with allies to develop assets, we should prioritise work-share agreements to create jobs and boost growth in the UK.

Mr Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have a poor track record in doing what she suggests? Under the P-8 and Apache contracts with Boeing, for example, there is very little work share and very few jobs coming back into the UK.

Nia Griffith: Yes, indeed; as my hon. Friend says, the Government have a poor track record. It is a great shame that so many opportunities have been wasted.

Mr Dunne: I cannot allow that to stand. I was in post when the P-8 Poseidon contract was placed, and an integral part of the relationship with Boeing was an understanding, now being fulfilled through contracts, that it would make a significant investment in RAF Lossiemouth. As a result, £400 million is now going into that base, in part to support and maintain those aircraft and other aircraft operated by our allies. Those aircraft will be coming here to the UK to be maintained and serviced. That means UK jobs and UK investment.

Nia Griffith: It is incumbent on the Government, though, to look again and strain every muscle to get the very best work-share agreements wherever they exist.

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): The argument from the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), whom I congratulate on his report, does not hold water. Of course, if we are buying these planes, we will need maintenance facilities, and if that is being done by industry, industry will provide those facilities, but they are service facilities for the RAF, and there might even be work from abroad. Where, though, are these planes being manufactured? They are being manufactured in the United States, with very little return of work coming to the UK. They have been allowed to get away with a very cheap deal.

Nia Griffith: On that note, I shall make progress.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Nia Griffith: One more time.

Douglas Ross: As the Member of Parliament for Moray, which is home to RAF Lossiemouth, I have to take exception to the points made from the Labour Benches. This is a major investment—£400 million and hundreds of new jobs—in Moray and Scotland and is welcomed locally by every man, woman and child. They will look very poorly at the Labour party today trying to say it is not good enough for the area.

Nia Griffith: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) clearly explained, a much better deal could have been done.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): The hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) talks about the benefits to his constituency, but what about the people who live near Woodford, the BAE Systems site in Manchester, who in 2010 watched as the Nimrod
MRA4 programme, 94% complete, was smashed up by JCBs and Britain’s capacity to build large fixed-wing aircraft permanently destroyed? Was that not the total destruction of British industrial capability—something we are trying to avoid in this debate today?

Nia Griffith: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, and now I shall conclude, as I am sure that hon. Members are thinking about what they will be watching later this evening.

When I was very young, I remember not only the excitement of England winning the World cup in 1966, but the I’m Backing Britain campaign. Before they go off to support the English football team this evening, I urge Members from across the House to recognise that the order for the fleet solid support ships represents a prime example of one that can and should be awarded here. I urge Members to back British industry and to vote to build them in Britain.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): The question is as on the Order Paper. Tobias Ellwood!

4.34 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Mr Tobias Ellwood): That was an introduction and a half. Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker: it is a real pleasure to take part in this important debate.

Looking at the motion, I see much on which we are in agreement, and looking around the Chamber, I see many of the usual characters who wholly support not only the armed forces and the armed forces industry, but our defence posture. Defence investment is important, and my view—I do not know whether it is related to the order for the fleet solid support ships represents a prime example of one that can and should be awarded here. I urge Members to back British industry and to vote to build them in Britain.

Let me approach the issue from two perspectives. First, why must we invest in our maritime capability? Why, from a British perspective, is it important for us to do that? Secondly, in aiming to meet whatever is our national security strategy and strategic defence and security review:

“Our national security depends on our economic security, and vice versa.”

It is important for us to persuade all members of all parties that we must invest, because if we fail to do so, our capabilities will diminish at the very time threats are increasing. We need to convey that message to the Treasury. Let me repeat that as the world becomes more dangerous, our post-Brexit economy is ever more reliant on security for access to our international markets. Some 95% of our trade still goes by sea, and we need to protect our interests there.

Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: If the hon. Gentleman will let me finish this peroration, I will of course give way, just to re-energise myself. If we allow that trade to be affected by the changes made in the world around us by nations that choose to breach the rules we helped set up after the second world war, there will not be any money for any Government Departments, let alone the MOD. I hope we can join together to persuade more of our colleagues about that, and not just the stalwarts and defence fans, so to speak, who are here today.

Grahame Morris: I apologise for interrupting the Minister’s flow. I do not think any Member on either side of the House would disagree about the importance of the Royal Navy and the incredible job it does, but our point on this side of the House—I suspect shared by some on the Government Benches—is that shipbuilding is a vital strategic industry. There are many benefits apart from producing the very best ships in the world, such as maintaining employment and a skills base that could itself generate more economic activity. I hope the Minister will take that into account, and not least the importance of the supply chain.

Mr Ellwood: There is nothing in that that I would disagree with; the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I will come on to what we are doing to promote Royal
Navy ships; we will come on to the core fact of what is a Royal Navy ship and what is a fleet auxiliary ship, which again goes to the heart of the difference in how these different types of ship are procured.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Notwithstanding what has just been said, surely the Minister will accept that whenever we buy a Royal Navy warship, an auxiliary ship, an aircraft or whatever abroad, we never own all the intellectual property associated with that product. We are buying F-35s, which are splendid aircraft, but we will never know the fine details of the box of tricks that makes them work, and that is a disadvantage to our country.

Mr Ellwood: I will move on to our maritime capability and our procurement process, but first please allow me to finish the bigger case of why it is important that we invest here.

I am making the point that although we must persuade Members of Parliament, we also need to persuade the nation. This is the same nation that enjoyed the fly-past yesterday and that expects us to step forward as a global influencer, but I am afraid is perhaps worryingly naive about the need to invest, because that is not a doorstep issue; it does not come up very much on the election circuit compared with health, education or transport. I think all Members would accept that point.

Our defence posture matters; it is part of our national identity. It allows us to sit with authority at the international top table and help shape global events. Other nations and allies look to us; they look to Britain to step forward, and to lead in the air, on land, on the sea and now on the cyber-plane as well. That ambition could be lost in a generation if we do not continue to invest; that capability, and desire to step forward, could be lost.

When we look at the current challenges facing Europe, the middle east and parts of Africa, we see that we are the best in Europe in terms of security, military capability, and intelligence and policing. We have an opportunity to leverage that position of strength as we craft a new post-Brexit relationship with our European allies and take a leading role in NATO, but we can only realistically do that with a sensible increase in our defence spending, which includes investment in ships.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): The Minister is right to say we need to build support not only across this Chamber among Members who are not present, but from across the nation, about the imperative benefits associated with investment in defence. I hope the Minister agrees that one of the ways to do that is by injecting a sense of national pride in our defence industry: by increasing the connectivity between our yards and our people, and between our people and their representatives. In Harland and Wolff in east Belfast that is exactly what we expect. It wants to be part of this investment and of this country’s defence infrastructure, and it looks forward to playing its part and building its support locally.

Mr Ellwood: During my time as a Member of Parliament I have seen a change in the posture of the Royal Navy that we can all be proud of. What is the Type 31? It is the best in its class. What is the Type 45? It is the best in its class. What is the Type 26? It will be the best in its class. What is the Type 31? It is a change in approach to modular design, which will be exactly what we need for export. This is what Britain is doing. We invented the aircraft carrier; we were the ones who first put that concept together. That innovation that is inherent in our DNA is what is allowing us to do exactly what the hon. Gentleman says.

Chris Stephens: I thank the Minister for promoting modular build in the UK. If modular build is good enough for the Type 31 frigate, surely it is good enough for fleet support ships, which could be built in the UK on the same basis.

Mr Ellwood: I have hinted that I will come to that in a second, but there is a distinction between fleet support ships that employ civilians and Royal Navy ships that employ Royal Navy personnel. There is a distinction between the two from a security perspective.

Going back to the point about value for money for the taxpayer, the Defence Secretary, the Procurement Minister and I all want to ensure that we are able to utilise the advanced skill sets in our defence industry across the UK, but the bottom line has to be value for money. Let us take as an example the ships that were recently purchased in Korea. The price was half the British value. Is the hon. Member for Llanelli saying that she would pay double the price for the same auxiliary support ships?

Nia Griffith: The Minister needs to take into consideration the fact that something like 36% of that spend would immediately come back to the Treasury in taxation. There would also be a knock-on effect for all the small businesses that would benefit from that money being spent out into the local economy. We would also have to take into account the cost of social security if those people were unemployed, as well as the disastrous cost of losing our shipbuilding industry altogether. Does he recognise that if we do not invest now to create a drum beat of orders, we could see the shipbuilding industry going the same way that the Tories let the coalmining industry go?

Mr Ellwood: Now we really are seeing the difference between us, if the hon. Lady is comparing this situation with the coalmining industry. Is that where this debate is going? I certainly hope not.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Ellwood: I am suddenly very popular, but may I just finish answering that point? Then perhaps we can go round houses.

This is a serious point. The hon. Lady did not answer the question on whether she would endorse purchasing a British-built ship that cost twice the amount as one built elsewhere. I hear what she says about the knock-on impacts for small and medium-sized businesses and so on, but a third of the money being spent comes back to Britain anyway. That is part of the contract that has been secured by the Procurement Minister. So in fact, we are already doing as she says, but taxpayers are paying half the price that they would have been paying had we purchased something from Britain. That is the situation that we face, and without wishing to sound too political, that is the difference between us on the Government Benches, who want to be fiscally responsible with taxpayers’ money, and those who simply want to
pay for anything. I absolutely want it to be British, but we have to have value for money. Also, it is wrong to suggest that there is no shipbuilding capacity coming through. I have just mentioned the aircraft carrier, the Type 26 and the Type 45, in which there is continuing interest, and we also have the Type 31 and the offshore patrol vessels that are coming through. So there is plenty out there to keep our capability alive and busy.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Ellwood: There is so much choice that I do not know where to start. Let us go with the right hon. Member for Warley (John Spellar).

John Spellar: Will the Minister confirm that the Korean shipbuilder that took this contract, DSME, underbid and actually lost significant sums of money on the contract? It was not a fair contract, and because of its general business practices, it came very close to going bankrupt and had to be bailed out.

Mr Ellwood: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman put it like that, because I was worried that he was going to say that state aid had been involved. I am sure that he would not suggest that that was the case, because I know him better than that, even though that was hinted at by those on his Front Bench. That was the commercial decision that the company took, but we are left in a situation where Britain is getting value for the taxpayer’s money.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Minister is talking complete and utter nonsense. On the military afloat reach and sustainability contract, there was no UK bid, and the reason for that was that the industry was told that the contract was going abroad. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley has just said, the Korean bid was underbid and basically bankrolled by the South Korean Government.

Mr Ellwood: The right hon. Gentleman sits down and folds his arms, but there was a UK bid.

Hon. Members: There was not.

Mr Ellwood: There was a UK bid.

Mr Dunne: May I help my right hon. Friend?

Mr Ellwood: I would like to move on, so I am going to make some progress and perhaps invite the Minister responsible for procurement, who will be concluding the debate, to go into the detail of the bid. If Labour is taking a position of only taking British offers and not looking abroad, it is not taking taxpayer value for money into consideration.

Leo Docherty (Aldershot) (Con): Does the Minister agree that the picture painted by Labour Members is rather inaccurate? Due to the remarkable scale of investment, not least in our new Type 26 fleet, the picture is one of extraordinary investment activity, so to portray the industry as being on its knees is, frankly, a gross mischaracterisation.

Mr Ellwood: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, but I want to move on to the second question that I posed, which is how we can best meet the ambition of optimising our industry’s capabilities while spending taxpayers’ money wisely.

The UK is a world leader in the defence sector. In 2016, the UK defence sector had a turnover of £23 billion, £5.9 billion of which was export orders. The MOD is the sector’s most important customer, spending £18.7 billion with the UK industry and directly supporting 123,000 jobs in every part of the UK. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne), in his report that was published on Monday, shines further light on the important contribution that defence makes UK prosperity, and I pay credit to him for his work. The report shows that there is more that we can do, which should be welcomed by both sides of the House.

Leo Docherty rose—

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is very keen.

Leo Docherty: I am grateful for that compliment. The Minister is describing an interesting picture. Does he agree that aviation and aerospace are an important part of that picture? Does he also agree that activities in and around Farnborough, including the international airshow, are vital? Will he confirm that he will be attending the airshow next week? If he is not, I will happily arrange that for him.

Mr Ellwood: We have wandered away from ships a little, but my hon. Friend is right. I pay tribute to the RAF for its event yesterday, and for what it has done and continues to do. The Royal International Air Tattoo starts at RAF Fairford on Friday, and we have the Farnborough airshow next week, where we will be launching our air strategy, based on the same principles as for shipping, which will be exciting.

Returning to ships and the role of the maritime sector, we should remind ourselves of the significant changes to the Royal Navy fleet. We have two incredible aircraft carriers coming into service, a new generation of Dreadnought-class submarines, the Type 45 destroyers—the most advanced in the world—and the new Type 26 global combat ships. We also have the Type 31e frigates—for export—which have deliberately been designed with a modular concept. Depending on the export need, which could be interdiction, surface support or humanitarian purposes, its parts can be interchanged simply to adapt to the local requirement. This is an exciting time, and all the ships will be built in the United Kingdom.

To achieve our ambitions, we need a strong shipbuilding industry as part of the wider maritime sector. As the Opposition spokeswoman said, more than 100,000 people work in this country’s maritime and marine sectors, including in the shipyards that supply parts and support equipment to keep the great industry alive.

Mr Sweeney: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will, but I need to make progress, as other people want to speak and there may be something else that we all want to go to later.

Mr Sweeney: The Minister refers to shipyards. He might be aware that a deal was done in 2013 so that, in return for closing down operations in Portsmouth, capital investment would be made on the Clyde to make it a world-class centre of shipbuilding expertise, but that deal was never followed through with. He talks about creating a world-class industry, so why has he...

failed to follow through on the investment proposals that would make the Clyde world class and restore that capability?

Mr Ellwood: We are investing both in the Clyde and in Portsmouth. Looking back over the past few decades, let us be honest that although we have world-class shipbuilding capability, efficiency has not been what it could be. Successive Governments could have done better—we put up our hands up to that—which was why it was all the more important to create a shipbuilding strategy. We commissioned John Parker’s report so that we would be able to understand—

Chris Stephens: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I will make some progress, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind, because other Members wish to speak. Let me make some progress and I will give way shortly.

Nia Griffith: Does the Minister recognise that the Parker report very clearly mentions having a “drumbeat” of orders? That is vital to the industry so that we do not lose skills, so that we do not fall behind on R&D and so that we can remain in the game. Does he agree that that is important and that these ships could contribute to that drumbeat of orders?

Mr Ellwood: I do not disagree. I try to be less partisan than others who jump up at the Dispatch Box, and I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady about the importance of that drumbeat of orders, but it should not come at any price. We need to make sure it blends with what is built for the Royal Navy and for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. We have accepted every single recommendation made by John Parker, and we thank him for his very wise report.

Chris Stephens: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentleman is sitting on the edge of his seat. Obviously I cannot refuse to give way.

Chris Stephens: The Minister is very generous. What did John Parker’s report recommend for how the fleet support ships should be built? I am very curious. Can he tell us what the Parker report says about fleet support ships should be built? I am very curious. Can he tell us what the Parker report says about fleet support ships should be built? I am very curious. Can he tell us what the Parker report says about fleet support ships should be built? I am very curious. Can he tell us what the Parker report says about fleet support ships should be built?

Mr Ellwood: The Parker report is about our approach to shipbuilding, and it has led to our shipbuilding strategy and our defence industrial strategy.

Mr Dunne: I am very keen to get on to this, if the Minister does not mind. I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman recognises that the Parker report very clearly mentions having a “drumbeat” of orders. That is vital to the industry so that we do not lose skills, so that we do not fall behind on R&D and so that we can remain in the game. Does he agree that that is important and that these ships could contribute to that drumbeat of orders?

Mr Ellwood: The Parker report is about our approach to shipbuilding, and it has led to our shipbuilding strategy and our defence industrial strategy.

Mr Dunne: If I can make some progress, I may actually be able to answer the question.

Mr Dunne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Ellwood: I am glad that there is nothing happening later.

Mr Dunne: My right hon. Friend has been generous about my report, which was published on Monday, and I am grateful for the other comments about the report by Members on both sides of the House. On page 53 of the report, I refer to the fleet solid support ship and make the point that the fact that we are currently a member of the European Union means that we are precluded from taking advantage of the article 346 exemption to require that ship to be built in the UK. One of my recommendations is that we should take advantage of the opportunity of Brexit to consider the opportunity, after we leave the EU on 29 March 2019, to build UK content into our own procurement rules, which might allow us to change the position, but we cannot do that today.

John Spellar: Not true.

Mr Ellwood: I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman reads the report by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow to understand the full picture. My hon. Friend is correct that EU regulations provide guidance on building those ships. The regulations do not apply to royal naval ships because, from a security perspective, every sovereign nation is allowed to bypass them, but the rules absolutely apply to non-royal naval ships—as in Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships—that employ civilians on board. I encourage hon. Members to read the report before judging what my hon. Friend has just said.

Moving back to what I was saying, we must have an honest debate about what is happening, which is why we need to develop a modern, efficient, productive and competitive marine sector that allows us to build on the work that has been done on the Clyde, in the north, in Belfast, in Barrow, in the north-east, in the north-west and in the south-west of England. We have incredible capability, and I am pleased to see so many hon. Members representing constituencies in those areas in the Chamber today.

Our new shipbuilding strategy sets out exactly how we can achieve such a marine sector. We will continue to build Royal Navy ships only in the UK while encouraging international collaboration in harnessing open competition for other naval ships. Our new framework will ensure that the impact of UK prosperity will be considered as part of our procurement decisions. The 2015 strategic defence and security review created a new security objective: promoting our prosperity. Competition and strategic choice remain at the heart of our approach, but we recognise that there are several different models for working successfully with the industry, and we need to take further steps to bolster that and make the right decisions to enable a strong partnership between the Government and industry.

That is part of the whole Government approach, spearheaded by the national industrial strategy, with its mutually reinforcing focus on driving productivity and supporting innovation, which provides a strong and clear policy framework in which industry can invest and grow. Key to that is how defence procurement might build economic value by strengthening UK productivity and industrial capability, including at a local level, and boosting exports sustainably. We recognise that responsible exports are now widely accepted as having a part to play in our wider national defence and prosperity objective. They are considered to be an opportunity, not a burden.

Sir John Parker’s 2016 independent review made a series of recommendations about improvements we can
make, and, as I said, I am pleased that we will be accepting all of them. He did place emphasis on the dysfunctional relationships between government and industry. Old ships were retained in service well beyond their service date, with all the attendant high costs, and it is important that that changes. So our new strategy is founded on three pillars. The first is better planning, giving industry greater certainty and predictability. We are providing a 30-year Royal Navy shipbuilding masterplan to guide all future naval shipbuilding decisions, and to document the number and types of ships in which we will invest over the next three decades.

The second pillar is a new approach to design and construction. We want to challenge naval standards and introduce new ones, forcing through advances in design, in new materials such as composites, and in manufacturing methods. Our new carriers are a prime example of that. They are built in blocks, with parts built in different parts of Britain, drawing on the expertise of 10,000 people, and being brought together from centres of excellence from across the country. Thirdly, we want to focus on building exports, where there is an opportunity, as the Type 31 will be the first frigate for export since the 1970s. We know that more sales can cut costs in procurement over time and give us the potential to buy even more cutting-edge ships.

For now, for reasons of national security, the shipbuilding strategy sets out that warships will be built and integrated in the UK via competition between UK shipyards. However, for the purposes of shipbuilding only, the national shipbuilding strategy defines warships as destroyers, frigates and aircraft carriers. All other naval ships, including the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships, as well as other Royal Navy manned ships, such as patrol, mine countermeasures, hydrographic and amphibious ships, will be subject to open competition—that means international competition. That remains where the difference lies between us and the Opposition, but it is the cornerstone of our defence procurement policy. I remind the hon. Member for Llanelli that she talked repeatedly about the taxpayer, and it is important we understand that. I hope that there is a compromise whereby where we want to and can, we will utilise British shipbuilding capability, but when it comes in at twice the cost of an overseas opportunity, we will have to be very careful about which decision we make.

Mr Ellwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—that would be considered royal naval class, so not manned by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary.

It is important that, as we move forward, we look closely at value for taxpayers’ money.

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): The GMB commissioned a Survation survey that found that 74% of people want these ships to be built in this country. Do not public opinion and the pride that people would feel if the ships were built here matter as much as value for money?

Mr Ellwood: I can only say that I hope that 100% of people would like ships to be built in the UK, but I also think that 100% of fiscally responsible people would like value for taxpayers’ money. That is the difference that this debate will illustrate.

Since the strategy was launched in 2017, the Government have worked closely with our partners in industry and made significant progress on our commitments under the shipbuilding strategy, not least through our continued investment in five River class offshore patrol vessels that are being built on the Clyde. Those ships have safeguarded industrial capability through a contract worth around £635 million, which is exactly what the shadow Secretary of State wants to see. We must make sure that there is this drumbeat of work, not only so that none of the shipyards face closure, but because it is essential so that we can continue to act when we require ships to be built for the Royal Navy. The first batch of the cutting-edge Type 26 frigates that are being built under the £3.7 billion contract with BAE Systems are also being built on the Clyde.

Mr Sweeney: The Minister mentions the River class batch 2, which was primarily designed to maintain production at Govan shipyard until the Type 26 was of sufficient maturity to begin construction. Does he accept that the only reason why Govan shipyard is open today is because a Royal Fleet Auxiliary order for the Wave Ruler was placed there in 1999 to keep the yard open until the Type 45 build could start? The only reason why that yard exists today is because the Government placed that Royal Fleet Auxiliary order with Govan, and that is exactly what we are arguing for today: to maintain these builds in the UK to maintain industrial capability.

Mr Ellwood: The hon. Gentlemen sort of makes my point. We need to make sure that we bear in mind not only prosperity and British capability, but value for money for the taxpayer.

The Type 26 will offer a leading anti-submarine warfare capability for its planned 25-year service life, providing critical protection to the continuous at-sea deterrent and maritime task groups. We are currently in dialogue with industry on the strategy’s flagship Type 31 frigate programme, which is worth £1.25 billion for five modern warships. They will be flexible and adaptable in design, as I said earlier, and part of a balanced Royal Navy fleet that will be deployed across operations in support of the UK’s maritime task group.

The shadow Secretary of State mentioned the launch of our fleet solid support ships programme, which is procuring vessels for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary through...
international competition. They will provide munitions, stores and provisions to support maritime and amphibious-based task groups at sea.

On exports, we are delighted that Australia is considering the Type 26 global combat ship and BAE as the preferred tender for its future frigate programme. The consequence of our creating something that other countries want is that further countries have been prompted to look carefully at the Type 26. That is exactly what is happening in our discussions with Canada. This is exactly where we want to go: we want to make sure that we have the capability to build something that we can export, not just something to keep shipyards open. That is critical. The UK’s long-term commitment to the Type 26, which is currently being constructed for the Royal Navy in Glasgow, was an important consideration for Australia in its decision-making process. The fact that we continue to invest in it showed our continued confidence in the Type 26, which we believe is the world’s most advanced, capable and globally deployable anti-submarine warfare frigate.

In conclusion—[Interruption.] I could go on, if Members would like. I hope that the House will join me in recognising the important role that the defence industry plays in helping us to meet our ambitions and commitments, ensuring that we continue to deliver cutting-edge, battle-winning capability for our armed forces for years to come.

Dr Julian Lewis: As an unmoveable Defence Committee commitment means that I have to leave this debate for a period, though I hope to catch Mr Deputy Speaker’s eye later on, I would not like the Minister to sit down without knowing how much we on both sides of this House appreciate that he has been prepared to speak as strongly as he has in favour of an increase in the defence budget. I hope that he will continue to press the Opposition to operate on a bipartisan basis in this way, because if we want to invest to keep shipyards open that is being shared in NATO at the summit now.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Earlier, the Minister was adamant that there had been a British bid for the MARS tanker contract. That was not the case, and I wonder whether he would like to correct the record.

Mr Ellwood: Before wandering too far down that road, let me say that this is just too important for us to play a guessing game and try to thump out numbers of GDP advancement. Other Departments will just turn around and say, “Well, I want a bit more of that for my Department as well.” We must make the case; we must spell out exactly what the money would be spent on, what savings would be made and what efficiencies we can provide inside defence itself. Therefore, whether the figure is 4%, 3% or 2.5%, the purpose of the defence modernisation programme is to give us the detail on what we need to do for our air, land and sea; what we need to do to upgrade in all phases of war; what we need to do in the new areas of complex weapons, cyber-security and protection of space for fear of hollowing out our conventional capability.

In conclusion, this Government have a responsibility to obtain the right capabilities for our armed forces. However, as a customer, we must ensure that this represents value for money for the taxpayer. Competition is at the heart of our approach. Our shipbuilding strategy is a pathfinder and exemplifies many aspects of our approach, set out in the Government’s policy framework, which includes an ambition to transform the procurement of naval ships; the importance of making the UK’s maritime industry more competitive; investment in the Royal Navy fleet; a commitment to exports; and a plan to boost innovation, skills, jobs and productivity across the UK.

We are rightly proud of all those who serve our country. We have a duty to look after them and protect them. That includes procuring the best possible equipment, which allows us to remain a tier 1 nation, leverage our industrial capacity and produce cutting-edge equipment for us and for us to export.

Mr Ellwood: Because of the mechanics of the Defence Committee, I, rather than the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), stepped forward to open this debate. However, defence procurement is his brief, and it would make more sense for him to give a comprehensive reply on this very subject as he is concluding this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The matter is now on the record for it to be picked up—[Interruption.] Hot potatoes!

I now have to announce the result of today’s deferred Division, which was subject to a double majority vote under Standing Order No. 83Q, in respect of the Question relating to the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order. The Ayes were 299 and the Noes were 211. In respect of the same Question among those Members from qualifying constituencies in England and Wales, the Ayes were 282 and the Noes were 201, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division list is published at the end of today’s debates.]
On whether this is a civilian ship or a warship, my party is in agreement with the shadow Secretary of State. We think that the Government have the wrong definition and we do not believe that they are actually fulfilling their responsibilities as far as the Parker report is concerned. These ships are armed and, as has been mentioned, take part in counter-piracy and counter-narcotics missions.

I want to read a quote from the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), who is responsible for procurement. He said in a written answer on 27 April this year:

“The programme to deliver the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) Fleet Solid Support ships is in the Assessment Phase. We expect that the ships will be provided with a limited range of weapons and sensors for self-protection, most likely to include small arms, and close range guns such as Phalanx. The exact equipment provision has not yet been finalised but will remain consistent with the defensive measures provided to RFA vessels.”

On that definition, the Minister who has just spoken is getting it wrong.

Mr Ellwood: May I invite the hon. Gentleman to visit a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship to see the self-defence assets that are on board? That is allowed by law, given that civilians are working there. They are allowed to have a certain accommodation of capability, as he has just rolled out. That does not make such a vessel a royal naval warship or one that is doing any kinetic operations.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The Minister is free to invite me. Indeed, I look forward to getting a suggested date and time.

I am not the only one who is picking a fight with the Government over this; I am joined by all the Opposition parties in the Chamber today, the shipbuilders who will be producing these ships when the order finally comes through and the trade union movement that supports them.

Mr Ellwood rose—

Chris Stephens rose—

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: The Minister has spoken quite a bit. I do not like not giving way to a Minister, but I would rather give way to a Back Bencher.

Chris Stephens: I thank my hon. Friend. Is he aware of recent press releases from the Ministry of Defence in relation to the MARS contract that the Minister talked about earlier? One says:

“The tanker is expected in Falmouth next spring when she will start military customisation.”

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: My hon. Friend makes an important point that I am sure he will expand on later. The Minister is most unkind. I sat and listened to him for 40 minutes and here I am being heckled as though he had taken five minutes. In fact, I am trying to remove parts of my speech to allow other colleagues to get in.

I want to come to some of the broken promises that the Conservatives have made with regard to shipbuilding in Scotland. Let us cast our minds back four years, when they were desperate—desperate—to buy off Scottish
shipbuilding in the face of a potential vote for Scottish independence. They promised 14 Type 26 frigates to be built on the Clyde: a state-of-the-art, world-class frigate factory, which, amazingly, the previous Defence Secretary used to stand at the Dispatch Box and insist was there. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow South West was getting phone calls from journalists in Glasgow asking if they could go to see it. Indeed, I believe that a Labour Member—the hon. Member for Glasgow North East (Mr Sweeney)—actually took part in the design of the frigate factory. We were utterly sold out again by the Conservatives.

The current Chancellor, who at that time was the Defence Secretary, repeatedly told people in Scotland that staying in the UK was necessary to secure the future of shipbuilding in Scotland, but that promise was slashed. The guarantee of 14 Type 26 frigates was cut to eight, but we were promised five Type 31e’s to make up for the shortfall in numbers. Shipbuilders in Scotland—and indeed, I suspect, across the UK after this debate finishes—will not be trusting the Tories any time soon.

Finally, I want to read out a quote from the assistant general secretary—

Simon Hoare (North Dorset) (Con): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: No, because I have said I am going to allow other colleagues to get in.

The assistant general secretary of Unite, Mr Steve Turner, has said, and he is spot on:

“It would be a travesty if UK government ministers handed the economic windfall that building the new Fleet Solid Support ships brings to another country. The skills, knowledge and capability to design and build complex warships would be hollowed out and the clock turned back to the 1990s when the UK’s shipbuilding was on its knees. By 2020 25 per cent of spending on the UK’s defence equipment will be benefiting factories overseas rather than here in the UK. This is taxpayer money that can and should be spent here in the UK to the benefit of our economy. The government needs to back UK defence workers and our manufacturing industries by guaranteeing Royal Navy ships”.

If 25% of defence equipment spending being spent elsewhere around the world is this Government’s idea of a global Britain, then, frankly, count me out.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Order. I will introduce a seven-minute limit on speeches. I call Kevin Foster.

5.24 pm

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker—it makes quite a change to be called early in a debate. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald).

Some people will be wondering, “Why is the MP for Torbay rushing to speak in a shipbuilding debate? Surely the south-west is just about tourists, fishing, farmers and a few other bits.” Well, I know that the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) will be talking about the huge importance of the Devonport naval base. If we look at the figures from the House of Commons Library on employees in shipbuilding in 2016, we see that there are 12,000 in the south-west—even more than in Scotland or the north-west, which we might traditionally associate this industry with.

It is wonderful to note the new-found enthusiasm of the leader of the Labour party for the defence industry in the UK. I will leave those comments there, because I would rather we had a more positive debate, but it is certainly a contrast with some of the views he has expressed over the last three decades.

Simon Hoare: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Kevin Foster: I will not, because I am conscious that there is quite a queue of Members wishing to speak. While this is an Opposition day debate, there are many Members with significant constituency interests who would like to speak.

In terms of the investment, it is welcome to see the new carriers coming into the fleet and the new Dreadnought-class submarines already under construction, which will hopefully be refitted in Devonport in the years to come, when they have entered the main service of the fleet. It is good to hear about other investment projects. We are seeing our Royal Navy become more competent and capable, with even more of a global reach. It is welcome to see that we are back in the South China seas, looking seriously at the British national interest out in the Pacific region.

While I have some sympathy with one or two parts of the motion, which I will come to, we have to think coherently about what we are saying. If we keep saying that these contracts—contracts that are not internationally recognised as something that should be national only—should be UK-only, we start to go down the path of the nonsense arguments that have been used in the steel industry in the United States. Donald Trump has used a nonsense argument about national security to put tariffs on Canadian and European steel. Let us be quite candid: Canada and the UK are some of the strongest allies of the United States. We share the most sensitive intelligence with one another, so it is an absolute nonsense to suggest that there is a national security angle to who sells steel from this country to the United States. Donald Trump has used a nonsense argument about national security to put tariffs on the United States. We cannot on the one hand rightly say that Donald Trump is talking absolute nonsense about steel, but on the other adopt a policy that is something that should be national only—

The part of the motion on procurement criteria is perfectly reasonable, and I will come to that, but if we keep saying that certain contracts must be UK-only, we begin a trend of protectionism. We cannot on the one hand rightly say that Donald Trump is talking absolute nonsense about steel, but on the other adopt a policy like that ourselves, potentially against foreign—

Mr Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Kevin Foster: I will, but very briefly.

Mr Jones: Could the hon. Gentleman give me an example of a single country in the world, including the United States, that would have procured these naval ships from overseas yards?

Kevin Foster: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Sadly for him, if he had waited until I got to a later part of my speech, he would have heard me talk about the Republic of Ireland, which is building naval ships at the Appledore shipyard in North Devon.
He asked me to name one country in the world, and he has got one: the Republic of Ireland. I do not think I will take another intervention if knowledge is so limited that even our closest neighbour is not known about.

Mr Ellwood: I just want to make a technical point. One reason why we are in this situation is that the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, as I mentioned, is made up of civilians. Most nations that have advanced naval capability have support vessels that are part of their naval fleet; it is for sovereign capability that those ships are built in that way. They do not have even the freedom to offer that elsewhere.

Kevin Foster: I thank the Minister for his intervention. The part of the motion I have sympathy with is about ensuring that when we engage in procurement exercises the criteria take into account the wider benefits of using particular contractors. One of the things I am slightly concerned about is the idea that buying from the UK is something we are only going to do if we have a protectionist policy in place. As is shown by the example I have just been able to give of Babcock building ships for the Irish navy, our industry is perfectly capable of winning contracts in the international market. That is because of the quality of the teams, the quality of the product and the cutting-edge nature of some our technology. The recent Australian navy contract won by BAE, which has already been mentioned, will see the export of our knowledge and expertise—many small and medium-sized enterprises in the UK will get jobs and contracts out of that decision—and it is a sign of the quality we can offer.

It is almost doing down our industry if we stand up in the House and say to its potential international customers that the only reason we would want to buy from it is if we were required to do so, because that is simply not the case. Our industry has moved on hugely, and it is a cutting-edge and competitive one. It is disappointing that more Members have not got up and said that in this debate. I must say that Members on both sides of the House have implied there would be a massive cost to buying here in the UK, whereas we can actually win contracts overseas.

For me, it is clear that our industry can go out and compete properly for work, based on criteria that take into account the wider benefit of delivering a particular contract in a UK yard. I want to see these ships built in the UK and I want a yard to win that contract. I want us to be able to go out and say to our international competitors that that was done because our shipbuilding industry put in a good bid, at a good price, and could deliver exactly the right product and one that they would want as well. Let us be candid: if global Britain is about saying, “We want to sell everything to you, but there is no way we’re going to buy anything in return,” it will not be particularly successful.

In every trade deal we sign, we should rightly look to include protections against subsidy or state aid. In the same way that we would look to stop the dumping of steel via tariffs, we should make sure that a procurement contract deals with any nation wanting to subsidise it with a view to having an unfair competitive advantage. Again, fair criteria would deal with that.

Mr Sweeney: The hon. Gentleman has perhaps heard of learning curves, which drive efficiency and productivity improvements, but that relies on a consistent drumbeat of work in order to hone efficiencies. His prescription militates exactly against such efficiencies being achieved.

Kevin Foster: I completely and utterly disagree. We can have such criteria, but I am saying that telling everyone else in the world “You can buy from us, but we aren’t going to buy from you” is absolute nonsense.

The idea that our industry is unable to drive efficiencies, deliver savings and, on contracts, deliver good-quality products at the right price for customers who want to buy them is actually doing down the industry. We did not win the contract at Appledore because the Irish navy said it could buy only from shipyards located on the Irish sea; we won it because it was right, Babcock having put in an excellent bid for the contract. Sadly, the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) could not himself name one country that would bid for such a contract—for a naval ship—abroad.

For me, it is absolutely right that we encourage people to put bids together. It is right that we have criteria—this is where I have sympathy with a lot of the Labour motion—that look to deliver products from companies based in the UK. However, I would say to Members that we cannot come to the Chamber one day and whine about the nonsense arguments about the steel industry in the United States, and then pop back here the next day and use almost the same arguments, in another context, about one of our own industries.

I believe that our shipbuilding industry will benefit from the fact that we have a big supply line order for the Navy, and that it will strongly benefit from long-term maintenance as well. I am the son of dockyard worker. My father did not build ships, but he spent 37 and a half years maintaining and repairing them. It is quite sad to hear people dismiss the after-work as something rather minor, because it is actually a massive part of a contract. The vast majority of the money spent on the Dreadnought class will be in the maintenance and refitting of the submarines over their whole lifetimes.

For me, this debate is welcome, and we agree with elements of the motion. There will now be some pretence that I have argued such ships should be built abroad. No, I have argued that we need to have a consistent policy as a nation, because if we are not consistent, we cannot expect others to be consistent when they are dealing with our industries.

5.34 pm

John Spellar (Warley) (Lab): I will now bring us back to the real world of the defence procurement industry. The Minister wrapped himself in knots over article 346, and it very much reminded me of Madeleine Albright’s response to Robin Cook when he told her during the events in Kosovo, “Our lawyers say I can’t do that.” “Change your lawyers,” she said, “and get better legal advice.” As I will come on to later, that is what every other country does.

We are not saying that we do not want to work in partnership with other countries; we do, and we want to do so effectively, and not just for shipbuilding, which obviously we are focusing on today. We have to look forward. I am pleased that the Minister announced an announcement on the air strategy next week. In particular, we are hoping for an announcement on the
future combat aircraft, which we hope will go ahead, and some indications of who we will be partnering with.

Many firms in Europe are concerned by attempts to exclude us from such developments, as we are already seeing with Galileo. It is a bit ironic, in the week of the Brexit crisis, that we are asking Ministers and the Ministry of Defence to be good Europeans—to behave like our European partners. However, the MOD seems to want to act like the three wise monkeys, keeping itself in blissful ignorance. It told the Defence Committee:

“The MoD does not hold information on how other countries apply EU Regulations for defence acquisition.”

Why the hell not? Why has it not asked those questions? Why would it not make those inquiries? It almost reminds me of the sign outside Balliol College during the student demonstrations of 1968: “Do not adjust your mind—reality is at fault.” The MOD does not even want to know the reality, in case it finds it uncomfortable.

France is a very good example. Let me make it clear that I regard France as an excellent defence partner, both militarily and in manufacturing. I congratulate the Minister for Defence Procurement on an excellent performance in front of a joint committee of our Defence Committee and that of the Assemblée Nationale. That is what we are talking about—co-operation and collaboration between our two defence industries.

Let us be very clear: the four auxiliary oilers were awarded with no competition, and furthermore the work was directed to the Saint-Nazaire yard, which was the yard that needed it. From my experience as a Minister, that is not uncommon in Europe, in defence and in many other areas, particularly transport. Not only will European countries decide that work goes to a company of their nationality, they will say which company it goes to.

My respected colleague, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), the Chair of the Defence Committee, talked about the percentage of the economy that is spent on defence. I am sorry that he is not here; perhaps he has another commitment. He ought to understand that the economic multiplier effect—the taxes that are paid, and the money that is spent, by the people who work in the yards that will build the vessels—would increase national gross domestic product, and with it the amount that went to defence.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I thank the right hon. Gentleman, who is my friend, for giving way. Will he say quickly why we should not also support things such as Thales UK, Boeing UK and Leonardo in the UK? This is a way of doing it.

John Spellar: If they have locations in the UK and there is a fair share of the work, that is absolutely right, but let us look at shipyards. I have mentioned what happens in France. The Berlin-class support ships are built in Germany. The Vulcano-class tanker support ships are built in Italy. The Cantabria-class oilers are built in Spain, and of course the United States has an absolutely rigid “buy American” policy as well. That is the real world, not the fantasy world of neo-liberal economics.

It is poignant that, in the week of the National Audit Office report on the failure of Carillion, in particular through under-pricing contracts and the Government encouraging it to go for “cheapest is best”, we are still being urged to adopt “cheapest is best”. Even within that, we do not drive a hard bargain. We do not insist, in work in the UK, on compensation.

The hon. Member for Moray (Douglas Ross) talked about maintenance work for maritime patrol aircraft. Maritime patrol aircraft will be maintained by the RAF and/or by industry, or in collaboration. That is not the issue. The real issue is what actual work there will be in manufacturing. Of course, maintenance is important, but that has to be done anyway. I refer not just to our shipyards and our aircraft factories, but to the UK’s very successful defence supply chain, particularly in engineering, electronics and, with regard to shipbuilding, our steel industry, which has been so dismissed by Ministers in the past.

This is also about maintaining the necessary flow of work, partly for that supply chain but also for our yards, in particular Rosyth. Rosyth shipyard will have a gap between the completion of HMS Prince of Wales, the second aircraft carrier in 2019, and the expected refit of HMS Queen Elizabeth, the first aircraft carrier, in 2030. Work on ships could keep the shipyard operational in between those dates and would therefore be very important in maintaining flow of work. We know how important that concept is, because of what happened in Barrow. There was a break in the drumbeat in the manufacture and production of nuclear submarines. The workforce drifted away to other industries and it cost a lot of money to recreate it.

As I said at the start, I urge the Minister to look at how other countries operate; to drive out the Treasury dogma, which has been imposed on the health service, transport and defence, that the cheapest and short-term is best; to think long-term; to work with industry, the trade unions and the supply chain. Back British industry, Back British shipyards. Back British steel.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: If everybody wants to get in, speeches need to be shorter. It is up to you.

5.42 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker. You will be pleased to hear that my speech is very short.

Today’s debate gives the Government a really simple and straightforward choice: they can show they are seriously committed to their promised renaissance in UK shipbuilding by ensuring that the contract for the new fleet solid support ships is tendered in the UK only; or they can refuse to accept our motion, proving that their commitment to a renaissance is nothing more than yet another in a long line of vacuous phrases from this Government.

I know the Government may argue the line that in their national shipbuilding strategy these ships are not warships and are therefore not safeguarded for UK construction, but in a written answer just this year the Minister for defence procurement said:

“We expect the ships will be provided with a limited range of weapons”.

Mr Speaker: That is the end of the debate.
He went on to explain weapons, such as small arms and close range guns. I am no arms expert, but that sounds to me like a ship that is equipped to defend itself from hostile attack. It is true, is it not, that under article 346 of the Lisbon treaty, our Government could, as other EU nations have, safeguard our own defence industries and tender these contracts in the UK.

I would stress to the Defence Secretary, if he was here, that if he is really in charge of his Department he could change that policy and set a new direction. Why can he not change this policy, adopted in the national shipbuilding strategy, so that ships such as these are safeguarded for UK construction? In short, it is a question of political will: whether he wants these ships and the associated economic benefits to impact here in the UK or abroad.

The arguments on the Labour Benches and among the public are clear. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) said, the GMB union commissioned polling showing that 74% of people want the fleet solid support ships to be built in the UK. That could create up to 7,000 jobs, nearly 2,000 of which would be in our shipyards. An estimated nearly 5,000 jobs could be secured in the wider supply chain and the return to the taxpayer could be nearly £300 million. It would also ensure that vital skills, which are dying out in some areas, are passed on for future generations. Many of my family members have those skills. I am proud to come from a family of shipbuilders. My dad was a welder. My grandad, Herbert Lewell, and my uncle, Alan Lewell, were both painters. My other uncle, Alan Richardson, was a plater and my other grandad, John Henry Richardson, was a sheet metal worker. It is proud to come from a family of shipbuilders. Many of my family members have those skills. I am proud to come from a family of shipbuilders. My dad was a welder. My grandad, Herbert Lewell, and my uncle, Alan Lewell, were both painters. My other uncle, Alan Richardson, was a plater and my other grandad, John Henry Richardson, was a sheet metal worker. It is safe to say that the Tyne has some of the best shipbuilders in our country.

We are grafters in the north-east, but years of Tory Governments saw the decline of our yards, culminating eventually in the closure of the iconic Swan Hunter’s—in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) said, the GMB union commissioned polling showing that 74% of people want the fleet solid support ships to be built in the UK. That could create up to 7,000 jobs, nearly 2,000 of which would be in our shipyards. An estimated nearly 5,000 jobs could be secured in the wider supply chain and the return to the taxpayer could be nearly £300 million. It would also ensure that vital skills, which are dying out in some areas, are passed on for future generations. Many of my family members have those skills. I am proud to come from a family of shipbuilders. My dad was a welder. My grandad, Herbert Lewell, and my uncle, Alan Lewell, were both painters. My other uncle, Alan Richardson, was a plater and my other grandad, John Henry Richardson, was a sheet metal worker. It is safe to say that the Tyne has some of the best shipbuilders in our country.

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Let me start with something really positive: the early-day motion that I lodged last month on the contracts for the ships that we are talking about today has received cross-party support. I also say at the outset that Rosyth really needs the support of all 13 of the Tory MPs from Scottish constituencies, none of whom are in their place at the moment—I am sure that they will read it in Hansard—to support Scottish jobs and Scottish shipbuilding. They really have a good selling job to do to their party colleagues, and Scotland expects.

I am also grateful to the Chair of the Defence Committee, the right hon. Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis), for asking a number of questions on the procurement process in a letter to the Defence Secretary on 8 May. These included really important points that had been raised by the trade unions on this issue. To give the trade unions their due, they have been exemplary in how they have conducted this campaign. The report that was commissioned, which was written by Francis Tusa, is a very good read indeed.

There is some concern about the timing of the award of the contracts, but I hope that the Minister, in summing up, will assure the House that there will be no further delay. I know that the workforce and the management at Babcock in Rosyth are good to go. That workforce have developed a reputation for dependability and bring huge contracts in on time and on budget, and what we need is a green light to go on with the job. The Minister referred earlier to our almost wanting to buy things that were commissioned, which was written by Francis Tusa, is a very good read indeed.

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As the Minister knows, Rosyth dockyard is the only dry dock in the UK that can take the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers. On the completion of HMS Prince of Wales in 2019, the yard will be rapidly drawn down and by 2021 will no longer have the capabilities it has today. The report published by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) and commissioned by the Secretary of State makes the case for a strong, sustainable defence sector that adds to the overall prosperity of the nations of these islands. It is not just about Rosyth, however; a consortium bid, structured well enough, can work and valuable skills that they could have passed on are dying out and fewer younger generations are looking to shipbuilding and ship repair as a career.

This Government have said that they want a strong shipbuilding industry, and that they want to inspire a new shipbuilding generation and transform today’s traditional shipbuilding regions into engines of economic growth. Today, they have an opportunity to put that rhetoric into action, delivering jobs and certainty for the future that will invigorate the communities in those regions. I just hope that they are listening.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. The formal time limit is what it is. If colleagues felt able to speak for only four minutes, rather than seven, everybody would comfortably get in.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I will try to make my speech go at the drumbeat of a Croatian polka rather than a Morris dance, Mr Speaker.

Let me start with something really positive: the early-day motion that I lodged last month on the contracts for the ships that we are talking about today has received cross-party support. I also say at the outset that Rosyth really needs the support of all 13 of the Tory MPs from Scottish constituencies, none of whom are in their place at the moment—there is a Cabinet Committee meeting—and I am sure that they will read it in Hansard to support Scottish jobs and Scottish shipbuilding. They really have a good selling job to do to their party colleagues, and Scotland expects.

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As the Minister knows, Rosyth dockyard is the only dry dock in the UK that can take the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers. On the completion of HMS Prince of Wales in 2019, the yard will be rapidly drawn down and by 2021 will no longer have the capabilities it has today. The report published by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) and commissioned by the Secretary of State makes the case for a strong, sustainable defence sector that adds to the overall prosperity of the nations of these islands. It is not just about Rosyth, however; a consortium bid, structured well enough, can work and
be shared to create a win-win situation for many yards across these islands and spread the prosperity we all want to see.

The Queen Elizabeth class carriers will need to be refitted perhaps as early as 2025. The work we are discussing today for the fleet auxiliary ships should be used to keep Rosyth operational from 2020 to 2030. Can the Minister tell us when he sums up where the carriers will be refitted if Rosyth does not exist come that time? I do not know if he has paid a visit to Rosyth yet, but following a Prime Minister’s Question Time, I wrote to the Prime Minister, on 25 May, inviting her to visit to see at first hand the great job our West Fife workforce were capable of. I am sad to say that I am still waiting for a response. Both the Minister and the Prime Minister have an open and hospitable invitation—please come and see us!

It is hard for SNP Members to have this kind of debate without referencing the 2014 independence referendum, as it helps to set the context around the trust, promises and guarantees given to the people of Scotland in advance of that result. To recap, the Better Together campaign promised that 13 ships would be built on the Clyde at a state-of-the-art, world-class frigate factory in Glasgow, but that commitment has been repeatedly scaled back and delayed. In fact, the factory never materialised at all. The Chancellor of the Exchequer, then the Defence Secretary, repeatedly told the people of Scotland that staying in the UK was necessary to secure the future of Scotland’s shipbuilding industry. The UK Government then slashed the guarantee from 13 Type 26 frigates to eight but promised five Type 31e frigates to make up the shortfall. The Type 31e programme has now been opened up for yards across the UK to bid for, meaning that the work is not guaranteed to come to Scotland at all. As far as I can see, there is no budget line in the MOD’s budget to pay for the Type 31e frigates. I see the Minister smiling, so there must be an element of truth in what I say.

In addition, there is no mention of the frigate factory in Glasgow any more. The workers on the Clyde will want to know why this UK Government are reneging on their promises. The Tories cannot be trusted on shipbuilding, with their record of broken promises in Scotland. At least the Scottish Government are supporting Scottish shipbuilding with a £30 million loan to help Ferguson Marine diversify its business on the Clyde. Where is that kind of support from the UK Government?

In conclusion, the Government have previous on shipbuilding, but the Minister has a chance to make up for the broken promises of the past. I ask him to work with the industry in Scotland and across these islands to deliver on these contracts and to convince those in the Treasury that it makes good long-term sense, and would be sustainable, to award contracts to our yards. We live in a global world, but today of all days it is time for these contracts, these ships and these jobs to come home.

5.53 pm

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): I will try to cut short my soaring rhetoric, Mr Speaker, and give you four succinct minutes.

I agreed with much of what the Minister said about the nature of the threat we face and the need for the UK to prepare for them, not just now but for the years ahead, but for the decades ahead, and about the scale of the potential threat from Russia, as it rearms and seeks to spend £30 billion extra per year on defence. We do not know where China will be in 10 or 20 years, either, except that it will almost certainly deliver on its vision to become a super military power by 2050.

I agreed with all of that, but then, towards his conclusion, the Minister clearly stated that there was opposition between building these ships in the UK and economic efficiency, and he suggested that there was opposition between building them in the UK and maximising the Navy’s capabilities. That is just wrong. We need only look at the experience of Barrow shipyard and the submarine programme in the 1990s, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (John Spellar) referred to so accurately.

Back in 1990 the Vanguard class of submarines came to an end, and the then Conservative Government did not introduce the Astute class programme so that there could be a seamless run-through. The result of that was not only mass unemployment, with more than 10,000 people made redundant, but all the social and economic costs which still scar the community now. It made the whole business of shipbuilding in the United Kingdom far less efficient, and it made us far less capable. Because of the delay and because of the skills that were lost to Australia and elsewhere, the first Astute-class submarine was £1 billion over budget. The overrun now affects the Dreadnought class to the extent that it is touch and go whether the new vessels will be in place to maintain the continuous at-sea deterrence which, next year, will have existed for 50 whole years.

It is clearly in both the nation’s economic interests and the interests of its capability that we maintain shipbuilding, so that if we have to greatly increase our naval capability because of the uncertainty posed by future expansive states, we have the necessary capability. The Minister suggested that it was in some way wrong to give contracts in order to retain work in shipyards, but that is exactly what is needed to maintain Britain’s capability to respond to uncertain threats in the future.

Jamie Stone: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Woodcock: I will not, because of the need for us to wrap up.

That reason alone—apart from all the jobs that will be involved—is sufficient to place contracts in the UK, and that is what the Government ought to do.

5.56 pm

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I must begin by directing the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I am a proud member of the GMB, the trade union that represents thousands of workers in our shipbuilding industry.

It is slightly challenging to follow so many Members who have spoken with such authority. I do not want to repeat what has already been said, and I shall speak as briefly as possible so that everyone can enjoy the football this evening.
The shipbuilding sector is of vast economic and strategic importance to our country. It is a £2 billion industry that directly employs over 32,000 people, with a further 50,000 jobs in the supply chain. It is a sector that continues to provide well-paid, highly skilled jobs for British workers—jobs that are desperately needed.

The industry’s dependence on the Royal Navy means that MOD procurement policies such as those that we are discussing today are critical to the success of British shipbuilding, as was recognised in the Government’s national shipbuilding strategy. However, I fear that the Government’s narrow interpretation of EU procurement rules means that they are needlessly limiting themselves in their efforts to support a major national industry.

Under article 346 of the Lisbon treaty, EU member states have nearly unlimited freedom in respect of defence procurement. It is a freedom of which many other EU nations have taken advantage in order to safeguard their own sovereign capabilities, as in the case of Germany’s Berlin-class support ship and Italy’s Vulcano-class logistic support vessel. Yet the UK has so far applied those protections only to the production of vessels that we define as “warships”. That approach lays bare the paradox at the heart of the Government’s attitude to our shipbuilding strategy. The very existence of a national shipbuilding plan suggests a recognition of the industry’s vital importance to both our economy and our national defence, but the long-term success of that industry is being impinged on by a refusal to do everything that could be done to support our national shipbuilding industry.

Nowhere is that demonstrated more clearly than in the Government’s decision to put the bid for the fleet solid support ships order out to international tender. We have already seen them begin to backtrack on their commitment to build three support ships, with the official tender for the project now stating “a firm commitment for 2 ships and an option for a further 1 ship” —so, apparently, two and a half. We should not be cost-cutting when it comes to the long-term capabilities of our Royal Navy, nor should we be putting an order of national significance out to tender abroad. The construction of those ships could give vital economic support to our national shipbuilding industry, and the £1 billion deal could provide long-term stability and investment in UK shipbuilding. As the shadow Secretary of State stated, GMB research shows that up to 6,700 jobs could be created or secured if the order were to go to a domestic shipbuilder, as well as a further 4,700 in the supply chain. That would build on BAE’s recent success in securing the SEA 5000 Australian programme.

As the House knows, I am adamantly that due to the industry’s dependence on naval contracts, a steady drumbeat of orders is vital. Building these fleet solid support ships here in the UK would provide a real guarantee to British workers and show that the Government are serious about supporting British business.

I have spoken before in the Chamber about the importance of the wider defence family. Those who design and build these ships are as vital to our long-term national security as those who serve on them. If we were to lose those skills and that knowledge now, as we prepare for a new post-Brexit world, the damage could last for a generation.

We cannot afford to sit back and let the free market take its course while competitor countries recognise the value of using public procurement to support security-critical industries. We must not allow our skill base to erode or our communities to decline by failing to do everything that we can to provide that steady drumbeat of orders that is so vital to our continued prosperity.

During the 1980s, the UK’s withdrawal from the defence export market and our failure to establish a solid base in commercial production saw 75,000 jobs disappear. The impact on our communities and on our domestic capacity was devastating, and the Minister, who has now left, should be ashamed that he compared it with the mining industry. We simply cannot allow this to happen again.

A national shipbuilding strategy is a great step forward, but it needs to be more than words—we need orders. Our Royal Navy is still the best in the world. Let us see to it that it holds on to its ability to rule the waves. We must protect our domestic shipbuilding and ensure that these orders, and the jobs they bring here, are coming home.

6.1 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): The 1980s will be ancient history for many Members, but the destruction of Clyde shipbuilding during that period remains a living, breathing part of political debate in the west of Scotland. I know that many Conservative Members will roll their eyes and think, “Oh, here we go: Thatcher and shipbuilding again.” I remind them that in October 1984, the male unemployment rate in the Greenock central area was 35%. The economic shock of Thatcher’s abandonment of shipbuilding left a deep wound that we are still trying to heal.

Since 1981, Inverclyde’s rate of depopulation was proportionately higher than that of any other local authority area in the United Kingdom, and it is projected to decline for at least two more decades. That is the UK Government’s shipbuilding legacy in Inverclyde. That is why decisions made in allocating shipbuilding contracts are so important—they can make or break communities.

The Defence Secretary needed only to visit Inverclyde to see the terrible cost of removing Government support for vital manufacturing industries, including defence shipbuilding. Many of my constituents are still angry about what happened. There is still an historical obligation to the area, which the UK Government have not fulfilled. In 1976, the UK built 134 vessels. By 2011, just four were produced by our shipyards. How different that figure might have been had the UK Government guided the industry towards a more sustainable future.

Thankfully, with the assistance of the Scottish Government, one shipbuilding yard remains in Inverclyde: Ferguson Marine. Earlier this year, Ferguson Marine bid as part of a consortium for work relating to the Type 31e frigates. Last week it successfully led a European consortium in a bid for EU funding to produce the world’s first hydrogen-powered ferry. It is not a company that is afraid to move with the times. The tendering process for the fleet solid support ships is another opportunity for Ferguson Marine to show that Clyde shipbuilding is the best in the world.

We know that the MOD goes some way towards agreeing with that assessment, as its recently published report stated that Scotland was renowned for building
to shipyards such as Ferguson Marine in my constituency. They are ready, willing and able. Their workforce will pay their tax and spend money in the community, and their senior management team will be able to invest for the long term in the future of shipbuilding on the lower Clyde. This and only this will guarantee a growing and stable workforce for generations to come.

Mr Kevan Jones (North Durham) (Lab): I welcome this debate and declare two interests: first, as a member of the GMB union; and, secondly, as the chair of the all-party group on shipbuilding and ship repair. This is a great opportunity to highlight a great industry encompassing not only shipbuilding, but maritime engineering, ship repair, design and combat systems. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the skills of the workforce in this sector.

However, the industry is heavily reliant on the direction of Government policy. The Government issued their shipbuilding strategy earlier this year and, unlike the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood), I have actually read it in detail. The all-party group is conducting an inquiry into it at the moment. I believe that it is a missed opportunity, because it is turning the clock back to what we had in the 1980s—more competition between the yards in the UK. The Government withdrew from shipbuilding in the 1980s, but the Rand corporation found in 2005 that, rather than driving better value for taxpayers’ money, that policy drove costs up. Francis Tusa, who gave evidence to our inquiry, made it clear that, looking as far back as 1945, we can see that striving for competition in the shipbuilding industry has led to increased costs and delays.

Unlike other industries, the shipbuilding industry needs a flow-through of work. A number of Members have already highlighted the importance of the regular drumbeat of work, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) gave a classic example of what happens when we get it wrong. When the last Tory Government stopped building submarines, they took away the ability for the industry to do that any more. If we do that again in other sectors, we will lose the flow-through of work there as well. The hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) mentioned Appledore, but Appledore has no work coming through, so he should be arguing vociferously for the fleet solid support ships to be built here, because there is a chance that Appledore would get some of that work.

To invest in the sector, companies need stability, and the only way to get stability is to have work coming through. We cannot turn the supply of complex skills needed to build complex warships on and off like a tap, and we have seen that in Barrow. People also forget that skilled people and apprentices go and work in other sectors of the economy, so investment in this sector means investment in other sectors as well. This is also about the supply chain, because small and medium-sized companies need confidence to invest. Overall, this is about sovereign capability and whether we want this country to be able build these ships, and I think that we should.

Furthermore, we should not just concentrate on hulls. The through-life support of these ships and many others is of vital importance not just for jobs, but for technology.
If we look at the weapons systems that might go on the FSS ships and other combat ships, they will be exportable around the world. The design is exportable. BAE Systems has had great success recently with the Type 26 in Australia, and the design is a world beater. We can only achieve that, however, if we keep the designers in this country, and we can do that by ensuring a flow of work. However, where are those ships being built? They are being built, quite rightly, in Australia due to the Australian Government’s commitment to having a sovereign capability to build such ships. If we want to retain skills in this country, we need to be able to do that as well.

It is a no-brainer that FSS ships should be put into UK shipyards, because that would help to keep work flowing through and provide stability. The hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) made a good point about Rosyth, because it is a world-class facility thanks both to the skilled workforce and the investment that went in. However, having put all that together, what other country in the world would then rip it apart and sell off the cranes? No one would, and that is the sort of vandalism that we are likely to face.

The arguments for why the new ships should not be built here do not hold a great deal of water. The Minister who opened the debate was completely wrong about the MARS contract, and I will read from an article in Defense News from August 2016:

“The bidding proceedings saw no British contractors enter the final stage of the tanker competition, leaving the door open for the huge South Korean shipyard to outbid rivals for the work.”

So—[Interruption.] The Minister says “final” from a sedentary position. Yes, I know that, because I have spoken to some of them, and they were told by MOD officials not to bid. There is an opportunity here not only to ensure that the new ships, which we need for our defence, are procured from this country, but to support and see a renaissance in UK shipbuilding, ship repair and technology. I do not know why the Government do not want to do that. Future Government policy needs to involve more co-operation with and support for the sector, which will not only have benefits for our sovereign capability, but provide a major boost to our economy, which will certainly be needed in the next few years post-Brexit.

6.13 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): I will try my best to keep my remarks to four minutes, Mr Speaker. First, may I welcome the trade union representatives from the Clyde shipyards? Such is their passion for the industry that they have come down to London today to hear this debate.

The debate so far can be summed up by paraphrasing that great conservative icon Lord Vader because, “We want these ships, not excuses.” All we have heard from Government Members has been excuses, because—[Interruption.] If the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) has ever watched the films, he would know that Lord Vader is far from a socialist.

What we have heard today is exactly what we heard at Defence questions on Monday, when Opposition Members were told that the reason why fleet support ships are going to international competition is that it is in the national shipbuilding strategy. Government Back Benchers have been told that the Government will make sure the weaponry for these ships will be UK-based.

The national shipbuilding strategy is based on Sir John Parker’s report, which says:

“There is the opportunity with the Fleet Solid Support ships for UK firms to make...bids, and hopefully secure the contract, thus contributing further regional economic benefits in the UK.”

The Parker report does not recommend international competition for the fleet support ships, so it is wrong for Ministers to say that the national shipbuilding strategy accepted all the recommendations of the Parker report. Frankly, we find ourselves in a position where the Government are saying there should be modular build for small frigates but not for fleet support ships, which is ludicrous.

The Government cannot have it both ways. I asked a written question on the range of the weaponry, sensors, arms and close-range guns, such as the Phalanx, and the answer, published on 27 April, has been mentioned. The Phalanx is a Gatling gun designed to shoot down fast anti-ship missiles, aircraft and fast attack craft. It is fitted only to high-value ships that are vital to naval operations, so it is ludicrous to say that these ships have limited weaponry.

The MARS vessels are fitted with cannons, mini-guns, machine guns and anti-submarine and anti-surface-warfare helicopters, yet we have been told by Ministers that they are not warships. I am sorry, but I strongly disagree. If it looks like a warship and acts like a warship, it is a warship.

Opening up shipbuilding contracts for international competition only makes sense if other countries are doing the same, so which other countries are putting auxiliary ships up for international competition? Is France, Germany, Italy, Spain or the United States of America doing so? The answer is no. No one treats auxiliary ships as a commercial commodity to be bought wherever, because the reality is that other countries see them as vital ships both for military and industrial reasons.

I support the Opposition motion, and the hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) made important points about the economic benefits of these fleet support ships being built in the United Kingdom. It will keep people in work, and it will bring tax, national insurance and vital revenue into the country. Again, if it looks like a warship and acts like a warship, it is a warship, and it should be block built in this country.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): Phalanx is a defensive weapon.

Chris Stephens: Again, the Minister is shouting from a sedentary position. The MOD website is full of the vital military components used by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, which is why these ships should be built in the United Kingdom in a modular way—the same way as the Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier.

6.18 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I not only declare an interest but, as the MP for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport, proudly proclaim that I am the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on shipbuilding and ship repair. I am very proud to be a GMB and Unite member. I add my name to the list of Members who have called today for the new Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships to be built in Britain. Build them here. Do not ship those jobs abroad.
This is not the first time we have had this debate. Members will recall that I led a debate in Westminster Hall on the national shipbuilding strategy in January, when I offered scrutiny and suggestions to make the strategy more robust and valuable to industry, to the Government and to our armed forces. I asked why, in an uncertain world, we are not spending more on defence, and I raised my concern about the damage caused to Plymouth and Devonport and to those who work for our Royal Navy both in and out of uniform by the constant speculation about the future of amphibious capabilities like Plymouth’s Royal Marines, HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark. I also called for the RFA fleet solid support ships to be built in Britain.

Ministers will know that they have my support in calling for more money for defence from the Treasury and especially in using that money to baseport the new Type 26 frigates in Devonport, to save the amphibious ships and to strengthen our Royal Navy. Ministers will also know that I am a critical friend of theirs, and on procuring the new RFA ships abroad, they are getting it wrong and I am not only not telling them. We need three RFA ships, not two. Cutting that order is simply not good enough. At 40,000 tonnes each, the combined order would be the same size as the aircraft carrier order, sustaining jobs right across the country.

My arguments are the same today as they were in January. We risk sleepwalking into major contracts being given to those abroad. No other major NATO power shifts supply ship work abroad. No other major NATO power would be so cavalier with its sovereign defence capabilities. No other NATO power would risk the skilled jobs of its defence industry in the way that is being done here. I believe contracts to build ships for the Royal Navy and RFA should be onshored. These ships should be homegrown, British-designed and British-made, using British steel and British technologies, and preserving Britain’s sovereign defence capabilities to design, build, equip and repair complex and important ships for our own use and for export. I favour a restricted tender for these ships, as I did back in January. They will be carrying arms, munitions and supplies, so only UK shipyards should build them. I also believe that history will be unkind on those MPs who offshore our defence work.

Let us not forget that when the Royal Navy is on the frontline, in contested waters, off the coast of hostile powers, the RFA is there with it. Often overlooked, these ships form a vital part of the Royal Navy’s ability to operate at sea, and they lead humanitarian, counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics operations in and of themselves. RFAs are forward deployed, so they are already in the firing line. Let us not forget that the Government would have the support of Members on both sides of the House if they followed the recommendation and applied a restricted tender.

I know that the hon. and learned Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr Cox) is now otherwise engaged in his role in the Cabinet and so cannot be here to talk about the Appledore shipyard, but it has been mentioned. One thing that it is doing is offshore patrol vessel is complete, the yard will have no more work. This little shipyard is first-class. It has the opportunity and the skills to build Type 31e modules or modules for the new RFAs, but if it does not get that order, its future looks bleak. I have met the workers from this yard and let me say to the Minister that they are ready, willing and able to deliver modules for the new RFA build. Give them that chance. Back British jobs and build them here.

6.22 pm

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I shall do my best to keep my remarks brief, Mr Speaker, although this is a subject close to my heart. I have grown up around the shipbuilding industry my entire life, and I had the privilege of working in it as a new graduate in 2010-11 and through to 2016. Through that time, I have learned the bitter lessons of failed and deeply flawed MOD procurement practices. Through the 1990s, my dad had to travel around the country following shipbuilding orders, as Type 23 frigate orders were drip-fed and we were usually in a race to the top with the Irish shipbuilders and Swan Hunter to build them. That was a recipe for disinvestment and unemployment, and that was the harsh lesson learned. That is why the Labour Government turned away from the policy after 1997 and promoted a defence industrial strategy, which was well regarded in all parts of the House. That was followed up by a terms of business agreement that would have guaranteed a stable pipeline of work, with one ship built every 12 months in a six-year design cycle for complex warships. That was extinguished in 2014 by the MOD, in pursuit of an utterly wrongheaded policy on shipbuilding procurement.

Let me make it clear: the capacity to award this contract to a British shipyard is entirely at the MOD’s discretion, under the terms of article 346 of the treaty on the functioning of the European Union. Indeed, it is common practice to have done this; France, Germany, Italy, Spain and US do it. Most recently, Canada has pursued a similar policy with its national shipbuilding strategy. Its big ship construction will be focused on Vancouver and complex warship construction will be focused on Halifax, with a new purpose-built frigate factory there. Sounds familiar, does it not? Only the Canadians have actually achieved it and we have not.

The Govan shipyard is now the mainstay of British shipbuilding capacity, with the largest steelwork capacity in the UK and by a considerable margin. It is represented by the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), and I had the privilege of working in it for several years. The yard is also the only one capable of building complex warships in the UK—to date. That shipyard exists today only because it was saved in 1999 by a UK Labour Government who made it clear that they would save it by providing a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, the Wave class, and then another, the Bay class, to that yard. That enabled it to be match fit to build the Type 45 destroyers, the aircraft carriers and, subsequently, as we see now, the River class ships and the new Type 26 frigates. That yard exists today only because that Government took a conscious decision to ensure capacity was maintained at those shipyards.

Today, we see a new crunch point emerging. The current Royal Navy shipbuilding capacity plan for 2020 to 2040 shows a large UK ship-construction gap, primarily focused on Rosyth, which will have a 15-year gap in work between the completion of the HMS Prince of Wales and the first refit of the Queen Elizabeth or,
indeed, the build for the new future amphibious capability. It is the only facility in the UK that is currently capable of building large-beam vessels wider than 20 metres. The new FSS vessels are 29.5 metres and the new future amphibious vessels will be wider than 20 metres, so to ensure that the pipeline of capability is maintained in the UK, we must build the FSS in the UK. To ensure that we have our future amphibious capability—as the Minister conceded, the amphibious capabilities are regarded as sovereign shipbuilding capabilities—we must secure that pipeline of work to enable future amphibious-vessel construction.

Let us be clear about the economic benefits, which the Minister dusted over somewhat in his rather flimsy analysis. According to the Royal United Services Institute, naval shipbuilding work offers a return of 36p in the pound. Some £285 million would be returned to the Exchequer, but that is just a quarter of the overall industrial and economic benefit to the UK. A recent Institute for Public Policy Research report, which took into account welfare savings and greater GDP growth, found that naval shipbuilding activity in the UK offered a return of 40% to the Treasury. That must be taken into account when we consider the awarding of public procurement contracts. Some 70% of shipbuilding contracts are derived from the supply chain, which was worth £2.8 billion in 2015. That is a huge industrial benefit to the UK.

Overseas shipyards like Daewoo in South Korea are not bidding out of altruism; they are aggressively pursuing state-backed support efforts to pump-prime their own industrial base. Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering in South Korea invested $6 billion in 2017. Sir John Parker’s report, which the Minister lauded, said:

“Overseas build brings its own challenges including potential denial of opportunities for the UK supply chain, higher costs of overseas supervision and potential foreign exchange risks”—as we saw in the recent RFA build in Korea. The report went on:

“Nor does the foreign build of ships make the direct prosperity contribution to the UK economy that an onshore build would achieve.”

If the Ministry of Defence is to stand by its convictions and its ideological position on this issue, I urge it to demonstrate the economic and social impact of domestic production versus offshore production, instead of the flimsy assertions that Government Members have made today, which have been utterly at odds with the truth.

If the Government define a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship as not a complex warship in respect of being fitted with armaments, do they class the River class batch 2 as complex warships? The proposed FSS ships will contain far more armaments than the River class patrol ships—[Interruption.] Yes, so are the patrol ships, so why do the Government define them as sovereign build but not the FSS? Their logic does not stack up; it is based on flawed analysis. We must have a virtuous cycle of investment, not a vicious cycle of disinvestment. The harsh lessons of the 1990s were learned: stop throwing away 20 years of coherent and proper defence procurement planning in this ridiculous pursuit of an ideological vanity that is going to utterly fail our shipbuilding industry.

6.27 pm

Rebecca Long Bailey (Salford and Eccles) (Lab): The World cup semi-final starts in less than half an hour, so I shall make sure that my comments are uncharacteristically brief.

I thank all Members who spoke today. I apologise for not referring to them individually. I give a special mention to my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), who made the case for why greater Government intervention is necessary not only for defence manufacturing in the UK, but, in a broader sense, for manufacturing as a whole.

Manufacturing accounts for 10% of output, 44% of exports and 70% of business investment in research and development. Output per hour is £4 higher in manufacturing than the average for all sectors, and the average annual earnings of somebody who works in manufacturing are nearly £4,000 higher than average earnings from across the whole economy. Over the past 35 years, though, the UK has lost 3 million manufacturing jobs, which is 53% of all manufacturing jobs. Compared with 66% in 1991, some 81% of all jobs in the UK are now in service sectors, and only 8% of employment is in manufacturing.

The industries that, as we have heard, provided our parents and grandparents with employment are no longer an option for our children and grandchildren. There are many reasons for this shift, including Thatcher’s big bang deregulation of 1986 and the movement of production overseas in search of cheap labour. However, as time goes on the longer-term costs of this shift have become increasingly apparent, especially in three key areas. First, there is the loss of jobs and the rise of lower-skilled, lower-paid jobs. Young people growing up now are more likely to find work in services such as retail, hospitality and other low-skill, low-wage industries that often have poor terms and conditions.

The second key area is regional imbalance between areas devastated by the loss of industries and key service industry hubs such as London and the south-east. The shift to a largely service economy has not only impacted people on an individual level, but has profoundly affected entire communities. Industries that were once the sole employer and engines of local economic growth have disappeared, tearing the heart out of communities.

Let us look at Rossendale in Lancashire for example. In 1984, 58% of employees worked in textile manufacturing, but now that industry has almost completely disappeared in that area. A more recent example is Redcar, where steel runs through the veins of local people. The closure of the steelworks there has meant that thousands have lost their jobs. It is not enough to let industries fall by the wayside and simply rely on the financial sector to provide growth and then redistribute it to other areas of the country.

The third area that our industrial strategy must address is our deteriorating balance of payments. Our current account deficit currently stands at almost £18 billion, or 3.4% of GDP, and we import 41% of our manufacturing inputs. Research suggests that a rise of 10% in goods exported, and a 10% decrease in goods imported, would contribute £45 billion to the UK economy. It has been estimated that a £20 billion increase in domestic production would directly create between 100,000 and 200,000 high-quality jobs. What could the Government be doing to support British manufacturing and to encourage the
building of products here in Britain? A key policy lever for supporting British industry is obviously infrastructure investment. Upgrading the nation’s infrastructure—

Mr Kevan Jones: This is all very interesting, but when is my hon. Friend going to reply to this debate? Some very serious points have been raised about defence issues, which are very relevant to defence workers across this country. I am sorry, but this is simply not answering them.

Rebecca Long Bailey: I thank my right hon. Friend for his contribution, but it has somewhat delayed my speech and stands in the way of the World cup semi-final. I am coming to those points.

What should the Government be doing to support British manufacturing? As I have said, infrastructure is a key tool in driving investment upwards. Upgrading the nation’s infrastructure in projects such as the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon, which the Government shelved recently, would have created more than more than 2,300 jobs in Swansea and paved the way for the creation of a new domestic industry with substantial export potential. Of course, the Government must ensure that they negotiate the best deal possible, but they must also, on projects such as this, start seeing beyond the short-term basic cost calculations and realise the wider benefits of infrastructure projects such as Swansea.

The most obvious start, so obvious in fact that it is shining like a Belisha beacon, would be using the enormous power of Government procurement to support British industry. The public sector currently spends more than £200 billion every year in the private sector, but sadly this Government have failed effectively to use procurement as an economic lever for supporting manufacturing. There are many examples of this, not least the failure to support British steel. It was revealed last year that the renovation of Big Ben clock tower is using steel from Germany, Brazil and the United Arab Emirates.

Mr Kevan Jones: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thought that it was customary in a wind-up to reply to the debate. I am sorry, but Big Ben has not been mentioned this afternoon. The many defence workers who lobbied Parliament yesterday on this contract expect us to respond to this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I assure the Minister that the rest of us are not—come on!

Rebecca Long Bailey: I am leading on to that issue. It is a debate not only about the ships in question, but about wider manufacturing procurement strategy.

Given the severity of the crisis facing British steel, this is simply shocking. The Government need to take a long-term approach to procurement, appreciating the wider economic and societal benefits of their decisions, rather than simply driving down the upfront costs. The Minister said that this is what the shipbuilding strategy states, but what I have read so far in the strategy is extremely ambiguous, and there is no detail as to how these wider socio-economic benefits are measured or quantified. Perhaps the Minister can respond to that point in his summing up. It would also be helpful to have confirmation that reports that a deal worth £2.5 billion in relation to the AWACS—airborne warning and control system—contract has been awarded to Boeing with no UK content.

Our motion recognises the wider socioeconomic benefits of procuring wisely. We have sought to place the fleet solid support ship order with domestic shipyards, creating or securing 6,500 jobs, including 1,805 shipyard jobs, which are highly skilled and 45% better paid than the average for all jobs. It would also mean that £285 million of the estimated cost of the order could be returned to the Exchequer through taxes. Many people across Britain clearly see it as right, moral and economically sound to take this course of action. The Government have a duty to use their enormous spending power to support British industry and its workers. Tonight, football’s coming home; we need a commitment from the Government that the same will happen to British manufacturing.

6.35 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Guto Bebb): It is a pleasure to respond to this important debate. I think that we have had 12 passionate speeches on this matter. [Interruption.] I thank the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones).

Although we all agree about the importance of the future of our shipbuilding sector, there is clearly a differential between my views and those of the Ministry of Defence, and the views of many Opposition Members. However, I am willing to recognise completely openly the commitment of those who have spoken in this debate to our defence sector, the defence industry and jobs within that industry.

Before I go on to my detailed notes, I want quickly to say two things. I have been asked to be short in my response because of a football match that is going on this evening—although, as a Welshman, I am quite happy to miss kick-off.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): I assure the Minister that the rest of us are not—come on!

Guto Bebb: I just want to place on the record a clarification of the comments made by the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). He was correct in saying that UK companies were involved in the MARS tanker competition and procurement process, but Opposition Members are also correct in saying that there was no British company involved in a final bid. I hope that that clarifies the point of order made by the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David).

I welcome the fact that the shadow Secretary of State has brought this debate forward. The comments made by the hon. Member for Glasgow South (Stewart Malcolm McDonald) were also very interesting, and there is no doubt that the team from Glasgow have very much argued the case for their city on this issue. I also welcome the speeches made by the right hon. Member for North Durham, the hon. Members for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman), for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) and for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), who made an important speech highlighting the fact that we have to understand the context in which these decisions are being made.
The truth of the matter is that we did recommend a shipbuilding strategy and we commissioned a report from Sir John Parker. We have accepted all the recommendations of that report, and it is important to highlight that we have done that in full. The crux of this issue and of this debate may come down to the comments made by the right hon. Member for Warley. I thank him for his kind words. He said quite clearly that he had no problem whatever in companies based in the United Kingdom that are not owned or held in the United Kingdom competing for these contracts. That goes to the crux of some concerns that Government Members have about this motion, because it says very clearly that that contract should be offered only to “UK-only competition”. There is no definition of what that means, so the right hon. Member for Warley was probably discontented with the Opposition motion.

It is very clear that the Government are fully committed to supporting our defence sector. The shipbuilding strategy was not developed in order to avoid our support for the shipbuilding sector. The whole point was to ensure that we did support, in a coherent manner, a shipbuilding sector that would be competitive on an international basis, that would be able to retain the skills about which Members have spoken so passionately, and that would allow the qualities of our shipbuilding sector to be understood and appreciated on a worldwide basis.

The Australian Government’s order of the Type 26 frigates in the SEA 5000 competition is an acknowledgment of the design skills that we have on the Clyde. It is also an acknowledgment of the confidence that the United Kingdom has in saying very clearly that we want to compete on an international basis and to offer our products on an international basis, and that we want to do so with a degree of confidence. We do not believe that the way forward for our shipbuilding sector is simply to say that every single vessel has to be built in the United Kingdom, because we are more ambitious for our shipyards. We want to see our shipyards winning contracts on an international basis.

I want to correct something. When I first stood at this Dispatch Box as a Defence Minister, I was told by the right hon. Member for North Durham that we had not sold a warship design in 40 years, so what made me hold in the United Kingdom competing for these contracts.

Mr Kevan Jones: The Minister is being economical with his quote, because it was not about design—it was about the export of a vessel, which we have not done since 1960. Does he envisage a day when we will be building French, German and Italian warships in the United Kingdom? Does he envisage a day when we will be about the export of a vessel, which we have not done with his quote, because it was not about design—it was for the Irish navy.

Mr Kevan Jones: I remind the hon. Gentleman of the comment by my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay: we won the contest to build OPVs for the Irish navy. Again, that seems to be ignored. I find it very odd that Members who claim to speak up for shipyard workers throughout the United Kingdom seem to dismiss our success in ensuring that we had that contract delivered for the Irish navy.

Mr Sweeney rose—

Guto Bebb: I need to make some progress because I must cover some of the points that were touched on.

From a defence perspective, we are trying to put a coherent plan in place to ensure that we have a competitive UK defence industry that can compete with the best. The way to do that is not to be scared of competition but to embrace competition. We have a shipbuilding strategy that says very clearly that we will understand the need for a national sovereign capability when it comes to building our warships. We need to make sure that we can measure our shipbuilding industry against the best in the world. The way to do that is not to go down the route of a protectionist “Britain first” policy but to invest in the capability that we have in our shipyards. That is why we invested £6.3 billion in Rosyth when we saw the fantastic build quality in the completion of the Queen Elizabeth class. That is why we are investing £3.7 billion in the first three Type 26’s in Glasgow. That is why we are showing a degree of confidence in our shipbuilding sector that Opposition Members need to share.

John Spellar: In a throwaway line, the Minister just made a disparaging comment about putting Britain first. What is wrong with putting Britain first?

Guto Bebb: The key thing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay said, is that when Opposition Members talk about threats to the south Wales steel industry as a result of the “America first” policy, they are quite happy to attack Donald Trump for his protectionist attitude. The same thing can apply to this debate in spades, I am afraid. Competition and the ability to compete internationally are based not on protectionism but on the ability to be open in the way that we deal with this issue.

Ruth Smeeth: Will the Minister give way?

Chris Stephens rose—

Mr Sweeney rose—

Guto Bebb: No, I will not give way any further at this point.

The key thing that Opposition Members need to be aware of is that in addition to developing a shipbuilding strategy, we are ensuring that we are looking at the future of our combat air. That shows that this Government are taking a coherent approach across the board. We recognise fully in the Ministry of Defence the importance of defence in terms of the contribution that it can make to the prosperity of the United Kingdom. I welcome the contribution made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr Dunne) in his report on the prosperity agenda, which has been welcomed by Members in all parts of the House. This Government and this Ministry of Defence intend to make sure that the lessons and the ideas put forward in that report get full consideration.

Many Opposition Members have rightly argued that in our procurement processes we should be thinking very carefully as to the means by which we can ensure a contribution to the economic wellbeing not only of the United Kingdom but of localities within the United Kingdom.

Stewart Malcolm McDonald: One of the ways that other NATO countries do that is by the use of multi-year defence agreements. Why do this Government not look at that seriously?
Mr Sweeney: Will the Minister give way?

Guto Bebb: I am sorry, but I have to make some progress.

What we are highlighting is that across the Chamber we want to see a successful British shipbuilding sector, and we categorically want to see the conclusion of Sir John Parker’s report implemented. He said clearly in recommendation 21 that he wanted to see the opportunity for British shipyards to compete for the fleet solid support ships contract. That is categorically the position of the Ministry of Defence. We want to see a competitive bid from British shipyards. It can be a competitive single bid or a block build option, but we want to see that bid forthcoming. We want that bid to win because that bid is the best, the most cost-effective, the one that offers value to the taxpayer and the one that shows that the confidence we have in our shipbuilding sector is justified and will be maintained.

Wayne David: Will the Minister give way?

Guto Bebb: I will, as a final point of courtesy, allow my fellow Welshman to intervene.

Wayne David: I thank my fellow Welshman for giving way. Does he think it is fair that we could be in a situation with the FSS ships where British companies will be competing with heavily subsidised companies from abroad? Is that a level playing field?

Guto Bebb: No, of course it is not, which is why every single tenderer in this process will be subject to the same procurement rules and the same European rules that exist at this point in time, to ensure that we have a level playing field. The hon. Gentleman should understand the importance of ensuring that we have a level playing field. The way to ensure such a level playing field is not to insist on only UK companies being able to bid for what is not a warship.

The strategy has been adopted in full and was consulted on widely. The Ministry of Defence has decided that we have to adopt the strategy and implement it, and we are confident that we will see the success of this strategy and, more importantly, a very successful future for our shipbuilding sector. I look forward to bids coming in for the fleet solid support ships from British yards with the confidence that seems to be lacking from Opposition Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House recognises the important contribution of the defence industry to the UK; calls on the Government to support the UK defence industry by taking into account the economic and employment benefits to the UK when awarding contracts and to publish a full, overarching defence industrial strategy; and further calls on the Government to make the competition for the Fleet Solid Support ships contract a UK-only competition to maximise the return on that contract.
Fishing Industry: Visas for Non-EEA Citizens

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Craig Whittaker.)

6.48 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I am delighted to see you in your place, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the Minister in her place. I have no doubt that there are other places Members may wish to be for the next half hour, but this is an important issue that matters enormously to my constituents and those of other Members and is deserving of our attention.

I should thank the Minister for her previous engagement in meetings and debates about this issue. I understand the political difficulties she finds herself in, but it has been apparent in recent weeks and months that interest in this issue is much wider than just those who represent fishing communities. It is certainly a cross-party issue. I have been notified by the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil), a Scottish nationalist, that he wished to be here this evening, but is not able to be so. I see in the Chamber from the Conservative party, the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and for Moray (Douglas Ross), and other Members who have an interest in this issue. There is a broad sense of agreement underpinning this matter, because the issues are highly distinctive to our fishing communities.

The root cause of the issues we are considering have as much to do with the recent history of the management of the fishing industry as with the skills shortages with which we currently have to deal. Historically, fishing boats have recruited labour—the deck hands—from their own home ports, such as coastal and island communities, but rarely from much further beyond. In recent years, although that situation has changed, the labour market has become much more competitive. Young men considering a career in fishing these days may also consider and find a very well paid career in the oil and gas industry, for example, in Shetland or in the north-east of Scotland. Renewable energy is now a source of employment, and there is also of course the merchant navy.

It has to be said that the industry is not always seen as a particularly attractive option for young people entering the jobs market these days. Those advising them, as careers advisers or teachers at school, do not see it in the round, and often as hard work in very dangerous circumstances. Sadly, the mortality figures for those working in the industry bear that out. It also has to be said that it has not been seen as an industry with a future. If we think back to the time when I first entered the House in 2001, we were just about to undertake a programme of decommissioning boats, and there was a second round of decommissioning in 2003. All these things have come together to present us with the skills shortage we have today.

This is not an unrecoverable position. I think the things that need to be put in place can be and are being put in place as a consequence of co-operation between the different Departments, as well as by the industry itself. Different Departments put in place as a consequence of co-operation between the different Departments, as well as by the industry itself. It may be that Members may wish to see some of the damage that has been done will not be quick or easy; it will take time. In the meantime, the need for labour in the fishing industry is acute, and it is becoming more serious with every day that passes. As a consequence, many European economic area and non-EEA nationals are now recruited into the fishing industry.

The catching sector probably employs in the region of 4,000 people in the UK. We reckon that about 400 of them come from within the European Union, and a further 800 are non-EEA nationals. As a percentage of the total fleet, that is a quite remarkable set of figures, although as a proportion of the overall number of people working in the industry, it shows that we are dealing with something fairly modest in size.

Currently, the only visas available for boats wanting to take non-EEA nationals are so-called transit visas. They are normally for those joining a ship, for whatever purpose, from a port in the United Kingdom. The requirements of a transit visa state that those involved should be engaged wholly or mainly outside UK territorial waters, which for these purposes is the 12-mile limit, and they are not allowed to work within that limit. I have to say that this is a highly unsatisfactory, hand-to-mouth solution for a number of reasons. First, the requirement forces fishermen to fish where the visa regulations allow them to fish, rather than where they know they will find the fish. That has a range of consequences, some commercial and some safety-based. I can put it no better than one of my fishing constituents did in an email this morning. He said:

“The whole 12 mile thing adds stress to an already very stressful job, especially so in the winter months.”

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does that mean that people who come from outside the EEA do not get paid until they are outside the 12-mile limit? What happens when they get on board?

Mr Carmichael: They are paid for the hours that they work—or are engaged in employment—but they cannot actually fish until they are outside the 12-mile limit.

My second objection to the use of transit visas is that it does not work for the whole industry. It works better for some sectors such as the bigger boats, albeit imperfectly, but for the smaller boats, working in the inshore sectors, it has very little to offer. Again, the fishing White Paper last week said that growth would be encouraged in the smaller boat sector, but it simply does not work for them. It is certainly no good for the prawn trawlers that have to work in shallower inshore waters, or for those who fish langoustines off the west coast in the Minch or the Little Minch. Those waters are fertile territories for those boats but are entirely within the 12-mile limit, so non-EEA crew are totally excluded.

The third concern is that those employed under the visas are left without many of the protections that the House has said over the years they should have. A few years ago, there were a few well documented and reported cases of serious welfare issues involving the crews employed under this system—paid well below the minimum wage and not given the basic employment protections that they would have if they were part of the normal land-based workforce. I hope that that is no longer the case, and I do not believe that it was ever widespread. I hope that it does not still happen, but I cannot escape the fact that it did happen and has been reported. That can be the consequence of leaving fishing crew in this strange, unsatisfactory, twilight world of the transit visas. It highlights the need for a scheme to allow proper engagement of deckhands legally and responsibly under a visa scheme.
The situation led to the creation earlier this year of the Fishermen’s Welfare Alliance, a coalition of industry bodies and other associated organisations, including the Fishermen’s Mission and the Apostleship of the Sea. I hope that the Minister has received and is considering the alliance’s submission about a new scheme. It is not in essence a new scheme: we seek the resurrection—or re-creation—of a limited concession that operated successfully between 2010 and 2012. Other such concessions exist, and the Minister will be aware of the recently renewed one for boats working in support of offshore renewable energy developments. Such schemes can be, and often are, drawn carefully for a specific purpose.

The outline of the concession scheme that is sought is one that guarantees conditions, safety and crew welfare that are compliant with UK legal standards. It would place limits on the duration of contracts of nine months and introduce cooling-off periods to prevent long-term continuous engagements. It would include the facility to transfer employment to another operator to encourage high standards and transparency, with regular contact with the maritime charities, such as the Mission and the Apostleship, to ensure the wellbeing and fair treatment of the crews that are employed. It would seek suitable assessments to ensure that only qualified and experienced crew from outside the EEA were engaged. There would be criminal records checks, reporting obligations on arrival and departure within service events. Such a scheme would require operators to sign up to an agreed code of practice governed by an organisation, possibly like the Fishermen’s Welfare Alliance, in which the Home Office could have trust. Incorporated into that code of practice, there would be—

7 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn. (Craig Whittaker.)

Mr Carmichael: As I was saying, it would require the incorporation into the code of practice a commitment to invest in training, upskilling and engagement with the resident labour market, so that we could deal with and address properly the long-term structural problems in the industry that are bringing us to this point.

I suggest to the Minister that these are sensible, pragmatic and very workable solutions. I hope that when she comes to respond—I know the Secretary of State for Scotland will be meeting the Home Secretary next week, I believe to make a similar case—she will understand that this is an indication of the willingness of industry to work with the Government in a way that will be constructive and which will allow the industry to get the level of labour engagement that it needs.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on a very important issue that affects the fishing industry, particularly around Scotland and Northern Ireland. I thank him for doing so. Does he agree with the assessment of the Scottish White Fish Producers Association that despite a continuing increase of professionalisation and innovation in the industry, coupled with the opportunities for leaving the EU and the common fisheries policy, it could take at least 10 years for the industry, at least in Scotland, to become fully reliant once again on local labour?

Mr Carmichael: If anybody should know it would be the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, as its members are the people who are completely immersed in and engaged with the industry. They know what they talk about, so when they say 10 years, it is pretty clear that that will be a reasonable estimate. I would have to say that 10 years is too long to wait. Another 10 weeks or 10 months might be manageable, but if it is 10 years, these boats will no longer be there. There will no longer be the need in 10 years, one way or another.

I understand that the Minister feels that she is caught between a rock and a hard place in respect of her party’s manifesto commitments at the last general election, particularly in relation to the cap on immigration numbers—for net migration, that is. We have discussed this previously, so I understand her position, although I personally doubt whether a scheme of this sort would actually make any difference to that cap. I would be interested to hear the Minister’s view about that.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): Is it not the case that the industry finds itself in a real bind in that fishing is a skilled occupation? As the Scottish Affairs Committee heard in its immigration inquiry, it requires considerable amounts of training, but the Migration Advisory Committee rejected the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation request to place fishing on the shortage occupation list in 2010, apparently because the workers did not have the paper qualifications to show that they were skilled.

Mr Carmichael: Yes, that does come to the heart of it. It is the question of regarding deck hands as unskilled labour. When I last met the Minister, I reminded her of Mike Tyson’s great expression that everyone has a plan until they are punched in the face. It is a bit like that for deck hands and their skill level. Everybody is seen as being unskilled until they are out in a force 10 gale with the trawl doors open having to fish. That is when we understand the real skill we are talking about here.

Perhaps I can help the Minister out, because I have become much more interested in last year’s Conservative party manifesto than I had previously been, and I found a little piece that might assist her. It states:

“Decades of profound economic change have left their mark on coastal communities around Britain. We will continue to ensure these communities enjoy the vitality and opportunity they deserve.”

If that commitment is anything more than warm words, we really do need urgent action from the Minister.

I want the Minister to understand why this matters so much to communities such as that which I represent. The economy in Shetland is one third fishing-dependent, so the numbers of people who work on the boats are not massive, but for every job on a boat, several jobs onshore are supported. If the boats cannot be crewed safely, they do not go to sea and they do not catch the fish. That means that people do not need to buy the fuel, to get the nets mended, and to have the engineering and electrical support that they need, and as no fish are caught, there are no jobs for the processors who deal
with the fish after they are landed. That is why this matters. It is the money that keeps businesses going. It is the money that goes into shops, that supports lawyers, doctors and accountants, that keeps children going to the school, and that keeps people living in places such as this. That is why this matters to us today.

I quote again the fishing constituent who emailed me to whom I referred. He said:

“We land 100% of our catch in Scottish ports, we source 100% of our food supplies, nets and rope, wires, trawl doors, chandlery, fuel, shore engineers and electrical support plus many other sundries locally in Shetland and other Scottish ports so why are we expelled from the 12 mile limit?”

I would like to hear the Minister answer to that question this evening.

7.6 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr Carmichael) for securing this debate and for the constructive and helpful way in which he has engaged on this important subject. This is an important matter, and very timely—I use the word “timely” with some trepidation. I note that this evening, I do not appear to have a Parliamentary Private Secretary and that there is not a single member of Her Majesty’s official Opposition in the Chamber, but fortunately, I do have my officials in the Box—as of very recently. If I did not know that the right hon. Gentleman was a man of such integrity, I might be tempted to suggest that this was a astardly Scottish plot to keep an English Minister from her rightful place of cheering on the England football team, but I am sure that it is coming home without me intervening in any way. Perhaps as Immigration Minister I should be focusing only on whether Mr Southgate—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): It is one-nil.

Caroline Nokes: A very good question. Where is he?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle): Where is he?

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Mr Carmichael: I am heartened to hear that this process of engagement is under way, but may I just say that there is now a real need for urgency? A decision that will be made after consideration of a report in the autumn could leave it too late.

Caroline Nokes: I do not like to pull the right hon. Gentleman up on something he said earlier, but he mentioned waiting 10 weeks or 10 months. I am certainly very conscious of the urgency—he has made that point very well, as have other Members—but it is important that we have the opportunity to reflect on the MAC’s report, and that we consider very carefully the needs of this particular industry and reflect on his comments about coastal communities.

Secondly, migration cannot be the primary—and certainly not the only—solution to skills and labour shortages in any part of the economy. As free movement from the EU ends, the Government will need to consider carefully what role migration schemes should play in meeting labour needs at all skill levels and across all sectors. I have no doubt that this will involve a fresh look at how immigration policy operates to meet labour needs at lower skill levels, but the Government’s underlying objective will be an immigration policy that is sustainable. Reducing dependence on migrant labour is part of that, and decisions about immigration policy will properly take account of what else can be done, both by government, including the devolved Administrations, and by employers to ensure that businesses can access the skills and labour that they need.

I am very aware that these are issues for the future and that the Scottish and Northern Ireland fishing industries are pressing for a more immediate response to their labour needs now. It is not the only industry that is doing so, and the Government must act even-handedly, but, as I have said, I will be reflecting carefully on the case put forward and the practicalities involved in delivering a workable solution.

I am also aware that, as the right hon. Gentleman outlined, there are some very particular issues around how the immigration system interacts with the fishing industry and the UK’s island geography, with a distinction between the controls that operate inshore and the system that applies to vessels operating beyond the 12-mile zone. I take on board the point that some see these arrangements as being unfair and arbitrary, and as presenting challenges to vessel owners in terms of compliance, but there is an obligation on the Home Office to ensure that its policies and requirements are clear.

At the same time, there is an obligation on vessel owners to ensure that work conditions in the industry are to the standard that we would all expect and that existing immigration employer law requirements are observed. It is of clear concern that there has been evidence of exploitation of migrant workers in the fishing industry. The point has been made that a work permit scheme for the fishing industry would help with this, and I will be reflecting carefully on that.

Mr Carmichael: The Minister is being enormously generous in giving way, and I promise that I will not try the patience of the House any further.

This needs to be looked at by the Government as a whole, because it is not just the question of visas. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs is now demanding that those who are employed on transit visas should be taxed as if they were working onshore, and surely that is wrong as well.

Caroline Nokes: There are some important issues on which we must work as a joined-up Government. I vividly recall that one of the first meetings that I had as Immigration Minister was with a Member who brought along a representative from the fishing industry on the day that the Taylor report was published. I was looking at the requirement for payslips and decent hours, and at the same time discussing the work permits and requirements of crew members working in very difficult conditions.

The Government are determined to stamp out modern slavery in the UK, and the Home Office wants to ensure that the powers we have taken under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 are used to address any residual underlying problems in the sector. We will also seek to ensure that wider work to implement the International Labour Organisation’s convention on work in the fishing sector is reflected in the checks that we apply to migrant fishermen at our borders.

I welcome the debate. I hope that I have reassured the House that the Government are listening to the case that is being made to us.

Question put and agreed to.

7.16 pm

House adjourned.
### Deferred Division

**Electricity**

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2018, which was laid before this House on 4 June, be approved.

**The House divided:** Ayes 301, Noes 211.

**Votes cast by Members for constituencies in England and Wales:** Ayes 284, Noes 201.

#### Division No. 206]

**AYES**

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Deferred Division

11 JULY 2018

 Deferred Division

Question accordingly agreed to.

Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, rh Mel
Stuart, Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Sunak, Rishi
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Swire, rh Sir Hugo
Sym, Sir Robert
Thomas, Derek
Thomson, Ross
Throup, Maggie
Tolhurst, Kelly
Tomlinson, Justin
Tomlinson, Michael
Tracey, Craig
Tredinnick, David
Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie
Truss, rh Elizabeth
Tugendhat, Tom
Vaizey, rh Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, rh Mr Ben
Warburton, David
Warman, Matt
Watling, Giles
Whately, Helen
Wheeler, Mrs Heather
Whittaker, Craig
Wiggin, Bill
Wilson, rh Sammy
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wood, Mike
Wragg, Mr William
Wright, rh Jeremy
Zahawi, Nadhim

NOES
Abbott, rh Ms Diane
Ali, Rushanara
Amesbury, Mike
Antoniacci, Tonia
Ashworth, Jonathan
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Barron, rh Sir Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Benn, rh Hilary
Berger, Luciana
Blackman-Woods, Dr Roberta
Blomfield, Paul
Brabin, Tracy
Brake, rh Tom
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Richard
Butler, Dawn
Byrne, rh Liam
Cable, rh Sir Vince
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Carden, Dan
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Champion, Sarah
Chapman, Jenny
Charalamboous, Bambos
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Cooper, Julie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Coyle, Neil
Creagh, Mary
Cruddas, Jon
Cummings, Judith
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Daby, Janet
Dakin, Nic
David, Wayne
De Piero, Gloria
Debonnaire, Thangam
Dent Coad, Emma
Dhesi, Mr Tamanjjeet Singh
Dodds, Anneliese
Doughty, Stephen
Dowd, Peter
Drew, Dr David
Dromey, Jack
Duffield, Rosie
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Edwards, Jonathan
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Dame Louise
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Farron, Tim
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fletcher, Colleen
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Foxcroft, Vicky
Frith, James
Furniss, Gill
Gaffney, Hugh
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Ruth
Gill, Preet Kaur
Glindon, Mary
Goodman, Helen
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Greenwood, Margaret
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, John
Haigh, Louise
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Carolyn
Hayes, Helen
Hayman, Sue
Healey, rh John
Hermon, Lady
Hill, Mike
Hillier, Meg
Hobhouse, Wera
Hodge, rh Dame Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hollern, Kate
Howarth, rh Mr George
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hussain, Imran
Jardine, Christine
Jones, Darren
Jones, Gerald
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Jones, rh Mr Kevan
Jones, Sarah
Jones, Susan Elan
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, Aftal
Killen, Ged
Kinnock, Stephen
Kyle, Peter
Laird, Lesley
Lake, Ben
Lamb, rh Norman
Lee, Karen
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewis, Clive
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Stephen
Lloyd, Tony
Long Bailey, Rebecca
Lucas, Caroline
Madders, Justin
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Malthotra, Seema
Mann, John
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Martin, Sandy
Maskell, Rachael
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McDonnell, rh John
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Moon, Mrs Madeleine
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Onwurah, Chi
Osamor, Kate
Owen, Albert
Peacock, Stephanie
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Ryan, rh Joan
Saville Roberts, Liz
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sherriff, Paula
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Andy
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Sweeney, Mr Paul
Tami, Mark
Thomas-Symonds, Nick
Thomberry, rh Emily
Timms, rh Stephen
Turley, Anna
Turner, Karl
Twiggs, Stephen
Twist, Liz
Vaz, Valerie
Walker, Thelma
West, Catherine
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whitfield, Martin
Williams, Dr Paul
Woodcock, John
Zeichner, Daniel
The Secretary of State for International Trade and others on promoting the value of food and drink sector products with the protected geographical indication mark.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I have regular discussions with the Secretary of State for International Trade and others on promoting the UK’s food and drink abroad, including those foods with geographical indications. Food and drink with GIs represents about 25% of UK food and drink exports by value, with Scotch whisky being the largest by far. Those play an important role as exemplars of quality British produce.

Douglas Chapman: I thank the Minister for that reply. Arbroath Smokies, Stornoway black pudding and Scotch whisky are all key products in maintaining a high profile for Scottish food and drink. When he comes to agree trade deals post Brexit, will he be consulting and involving the Scottish Government in these discussions to make sure that all brands are protected?

George Eustice: Yes, and I would like to pay tribute to the work that the Scottish Conservative MPs have done to highlight these important issues. On Scotch whisky, we, along with the Department for International Trade, have done a lot of work with other Departments to ensure that we highlight the importance of these vital brands.

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): The Secretary of State was explicit that “market access for fisheries products is separate to the question of fishing opportunities and access to waters.” But what use are fishing opportunities and access to waters if your product risks being held up in customs? For industries such as the live shellfish industry of Orkney, this is literally a life-and-death situation, for should one of these shellfish perish, the whole tank is lost. Has the Minister had conversations about the difficulty we may have in the near future?

George Eustice: I am not aware there is a precedent anywhere else in the world of giving a country access to your waters—to your own resources—in return for trade agreements. That is just not the way it works. There will be a discussion and an agreement on the management of shared fisheries stocks, and we are clear in our White Paper that we will manage our own exclusive economic zone and control access to it. Then there is a separate discussion to be had on trade, and the EU wants access to the UK market, too.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): As well as working with the Scottish Government, does the Minister agree that the Scotch Whisky Association has done an incredible amount of work on this issue, which is hugely important for that industry? Will he give further assurance that he is working across government—not just in his Department, but with every Department—to ensure that everyone knows how important the GIs are?

Dr Coffey: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is a great pleasure to be back, and I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley) for the fantastic work he did.

Last year, we were listening to hon. Members and the industry, which is why we changed the criteria for the woodland carbon fund and the woodland creation planning grant to make them more attractive to applicants. I am pleased to say that countryside stewardship applications have increased; we have established a large-scale woodland creation unit; we are providing funding to kick-start the northern forest; and we have appointed the national tree champion, Sir William Worsley, to help drive the growth in forestry.

Chris Davies: May I, too, say how wonderful it is to see the Minister back in her place? But while back in her place, can she reassure me that a pilot forestry investment zone will be launched this summer and that its sole focus will be on delivering the productive softwood planting that the forestry industry, including sawmills in my constituency, so desperately needs?
Dr Coffey: My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield did announce that the first forestry investment zone will be in Cumbria. I cannot give my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Chris Davies) an assurance that it will solely focus on softwood planting, but we are recruiting the person to lead that zone and I am confident that they will be in place before the end of year.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Minister back, but will she give that Secretary of State of hers a good thump in the direction of taking trees seriously? There is a close relationship between trees and the quality of air that we breathe in our country, and this Government only plan to sort out clean air by 2040. Can we not have more trees, as under the northern forest initiative and the white rose initiative? Will she get that man next to her to do something and do it now?

Dr Coffey: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is exceptionally passionate about trees; I think the hon. Gentleman will find that the Secretary of State’s constituency has the highest concentration of trees in the country. This issue is not always straightforward. I was at the planting of the first Lowther park estate, where 230,000 trees are due to be planted, and there is more happening up on Duddington moor. Through things such as the woodland creation grant and the creation unit, we will continue to work to get more parts of the country planting quickly.

Dame Caroline Spelman (Meriden) (Con): Mr Speaker, I am sure that in your constituency and mine there will be a lot of tree planting to replace the trees that have to be felled for the construction of High Speed 2. I welcome the Minister back to her role. Will she give serious consideration to the proposal for a new national park at the heart of the west midlands conurbation, so that the biodiversity lost can be offset at scale?

Dr Coffey: The Department for Transport has already issued a grant so that tree planting can start, so that is already under way. Julian Glover is undertaking a review of national parks and we want to understand the future perspective. I am sure that my right hon. Friend’s application will be considered carefully.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman) may not know this, because she does not have eyes in the back of her head, but I can advise her that she has now thoroughly wound up the right hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Dame Cheryl Gillian).

Dame Cheryl Gillian (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): Pursuant to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman), I remind the Minister that HS2 will go through Buckinghamshire and the Chiltern hills. Is she aware that we are contemplating applying for national park status for the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty? That would help to protect what ancient woodland and trees are left after HS2 has gone through the middle of Buckinghamshire.

Dr Coffey: I am sure that that consideration will be given serious attention in due course.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Oh, very well; I call Mr Philip Dunne.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister back to her place. On the proper stewardship of trees, is she satisfied that the existing arrangements between the Forest Holidays group and the Forestry Commission fully accord with the commission’s statutory objectives?

Dr Coffey: We are not happy about the arrangement that the Forestry Commission has entered into with Forest Holidays, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has asked Colin Day—the Department’s non-executive director and chair of its audit and risk committee—to undertake a review. He will be investigating the matter carefully.1

Leaving the EU: UK Fish Exports

3. Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): What steps the Government are taking to ensure that UK fish exports have free and frictionless market access to the rest of Europe in the event of the UK leaving the EU. [906412]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): We want to secure an agreement with the European Union that ensures tariff-free and frictionless market access for fisheries products. That is of course a separate negotiation from those on fishing opportunities and access to waters, which will be founded on the UK’s legal status as an independent coastal state and will be consistent with fisheries agreements internationally.

Mr Bradshaw: Commissions on the tennis, Mr Speaker.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): And the football.

Mr Bradshaw: I welcome the Secretary of State’s belated recognition that we cannot have frictionless exports to the European Union for our fish and agriculture products if we are not in a single market, as the Chequers agreement recognises. Will he explain why his fellow hard-Breiteers do not seem to grasp that simple truth? Do they just not care about our fish and agricultural exports?

Michael Gove: It would be wrong to say that the position put forward in the Chequers agreement is analogous to membership of the single market or the European economic area. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that membership of the European economic area and the single market does not guarantee entirely frictionless access to the European Union for fisheries or other products.

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): Many fisheries and seafood-processing companies in my constituency have come together with other businesses to express interest in the concept of a free port, post-Brexit. Will the Secretary of State assure them that the Government will agree to nothing that would prevent a future Government from designating free ports?

Michael Gove: It would be reckless of any Government to do anything that would imperil the ambitions and aspirations exhibited by the exemplary constituents whom my hon. Friend serves so well.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The White Paper makes it clear that the Government do not intend to change the method for allocating existing quotas. Two thirds of UK fish quotas are controlled by three huge companies, and small boats are being squeezed. Is it not time for the Government to admit that Scotland’s fishermen will see absolutely no benefit from Brexit, but will lose access to the world’s biggest marketplace?

Michael Gove: Almost everything in that question was wrong, but that does not surprise me because almost everything in the Scottish National party’s position on fisheries is wrong. It wants to stay in the European Union and therefore in the common fisheries policy and yet it wants Scotland’s fishermen to enjoy all the advantages of being outside the common fisheries policy. Some Members of this House have been accused of wanting to have their cake and eat it. I am afraid that SNP Members want to have a whole chain of bakeries and eat everything in them. If hypocrisy were a term that was allowed to be used in this House, then it would fit the Scottish National party like a bunnet.

Mr Speaker: There is no prohibition on the use of the term. It can apply to a collective, but not to an individual. The judgment as to whether the Minister is on the right side of the line falls to me. Happily, from the point of view of the right hon. Gentleman, he has not erred.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): Persuade me that the common rulebook is not the acquis by another name.

Michael Gove: The acquis is, of course, a French term and the common rulebook is an Anglo-Saxon one, and therefore they are happily distinct. I know that my right hon. Friend is fond of Anglo-Saxon terms and pithy ones at that. One thing I would say about the common rulebook is that it governs goods and it governs agri-foods only in so far as is necessary to have free and frictionless access. In that respect, we remain, and will be, a sovereign nation.

Leaving the EU: Agriculture and Fisheries Management

4. Mrs Sheryll Murray (South East Cornwall) (Con): What plans he has to reform agriculture and fisheries management when the UK leaves the EU.

5. Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): What plans he has to reform agriculture and fisheries management when the UK leaves the EU.

6. The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Mr Speaker, thank you for your indulgence on the line call earlier in saying that the ball was in.

The Government’s consultation setting out the policy framework for agriculture in England after the UK leaves the EU closed on 8 May. All responses have been analysed and will be used to inform future policy. A report of the findings will be published in due course. Plans for the reform of fisheries management when the UK leaves the EU were set out in the “Sustainable fisheries for future generations” White Paper, which was published on 4 July.

Mrs Murray: What post-Brexit safeguards are being put in place to stop EU vessels registering in the UK simply to farm our waters of fish, as happened in the Factortame case, if there is to be a common rulebook in the agriculture and food sector?

Michael Gove: The hon. Lady raises some very important points. The first thing to say is that the Factortame case was a case that relied on the supremacy of the European Court of Justice. The supremacy of the European Court of Justice will end under the Government’s proposals for leaving the European Union; that is quite clear. The second thing is that the common rulebook on agri-food applies only to those sanitary and phytosanitary requirements that allow us frictionless access to the EU. That means that we will be outside the common agricultural policy and outside the common fisheries policy. It is also the case that economic link conditions can be reformed in such a way to meet the needs that she points out.

Maria Caulfield: What consideration has been given to changing the fishing-quotas-based system post Brexit to either a percentage-based system or a days-at-sea-based system, which would significantly help my fishermen in Newhaven?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend stands up very well for the fisher people of Newhaven. One thing we can do outside the common fisheries policy, as the fisheries White Paper spells out, is reallocate additional quota and we can also—and we propose to do this—pilot days-at-sea or effort-based methods of fisheries control. We hope to work with inshore fishermen such as those whom she represents so well.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The truth is that the Government could be taking action today to support the UK’s catching sector. Instead, they are sending the most lucrative licences out of the UK. Why?

Michael Gove: Well, we are in the European Union at the moment and governed by its rules and that is why the people of Grimsby voted to leave.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): When will the farmers and crofters in my constituency know the shape and content of the UK-wide framework for the payment of agricultural support post Brexit?

Michael Gove: There are many important things for the farmers whom the right hon. Gentleman represents, but the details of how payments will be paid have been laid out by the Scottish Government, by the relevant Cabinet Secretary, Fergus Ewing, and I know that he is consulting on those proposals.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): As my right hon. Friend will be profoundly aware, the EU Commission wishes to maintain guaranteed and continued access to UK waters even after we leave the EU and the common fisheries policy. I am pleased that, in the fisheries White Paper published last week and in discussions with fishermen during his visit to Peterhead in my

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senior executives of monopoly water providers. Government’s policy is on the level of remuneration of its access to British waters with our access to EU markets? Government will not allow the Commission to conflate today that, as negotiations with the EU continue, this position of this Government. Will he confirm again constituency last week, he confirmed that that is not the position of this Government. Will he confirm again today that, as negotiations with the EU continue, this Government will not allow the Commission to conflate its access to British waters with our access to EU markets?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend puts the case absolutely correctly.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): It is a delight to see the DEFRA team still in their place, but may I offer a special welcome to the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), who we have missed? We hope that she enjoys her time back as part of the team.

Will the Government tell us exactly who they can sign a free trade deal with, apart from the EU, whereby we do not degrade either environmental protection or animal welfare standards?

Michael Gove: Lots of countries.

Monopoly Water Providers: Senior Executive Pay

5. Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): What the Government’s policy is on the level of remuneration of senior executives of monopoly water providers. [906414]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): On 1 March I set out the need for water companies to respond to public concerns over executive pay and a number of other practices. The Government fully support Ofwat’s reforms that require water companies to ensure that executive pay is linked to customer service.

Ian C. Lucas: The chief executive of Severn Trent earned £2.45 million last year. As a Wrexham customer I have to contribute to that salary, following the hostile takeover of our local water company. Does the Secretary of State, in his new progressive form, agree that Severn Trent should follow the example of the John Lewis Partnership and link the pay of its highest paid chief executives to those within the business who are lower paid?

Michael Gove: It will not surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I am a huge fan of the John Lewis Partnership and the leadership that its executives have shown. This Government and this DEFRA team have taken stronger action than previous Governments and previous teams have done in order to ensure that water companies smarten up their act, that they deal not just with executive pay, but with some of the byzantine financial structures that have not worked in consumer interests in the past, and that they invest more in improving the environment and keeping bills low.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Far too much water in this country is wasted by it leaking out of water pipes. Why on earth can we not link the pay of senior water company executives to their achievement of leakage reduction targets?

Michael Gove: Ofwat, the regulator, has been stringent in the steps that it has taken in order to ensure that performance will be linked to pay in the future.

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I first join you and others in welcoming back the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey), to her rightful place at the Dispatch Box?

I am afraid that prior to the “beast from the east” Ofwat made it perfectly clear that it had no interest in taking direct action on executive pay, tax structures or dividends. May I say how delighted Labour Members are that, after months of raising this very issue, Ofwat has finally U-turned on its position? Will the Secretary of State explain why it has taken Ofwat so long to take this action and tighten up the weak regulation that has let customers down so badly?

Michael Gove: I am so glad that the hon. Lady welcomes the action that Ofwat is taking. Ofwat has superb leadership and I am four-square behind that leadership in ensuring that we get a better deal from water companies.

Waste Criminals

6. James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle waste criminals. [906416]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): Since 2014, the Government have given the Environment Agency an extra £60 million to tackle waste crime, as well as additional powers to take stronger enforcement action. This year we consulted on further measures to prevent crime at waste sites and I have commissioned a review of serious and organised crime in the sector. The review’s recommendations will inform our strategic approach to waste crime in the forthcoming resources and waste strategy.

James Cartlidge: One area about which I get considerable correspondence from my constituents is that of fly-tipping. Does the Secretary of State agree that it is not only morally reprehensible, but a threat to the environment and our wildlife? Will he also outline what the Government are doing to tackle fly-tipping, particularly in the countryside?

Michael Gove: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; fly-tipping is morally reprehensible and does have environmental costs. That is why a review, being led by Lizzie Noel, one of the non-executive directors at DEFRA, and supported by Chris Salmon, former police and crime commissioner for Dyfed-Powys, will look at exactly what powers and sanctions are required to deal effectively with this scourge.

Mr Clive Betts (Sheffield South East) (Lab): Fly-tipping in all its forms is unacceptable, but it is particularly unacceptable when businesses try to avoid costs by dumping commercial waste on unauthorised sites. In such circumstances, does the Secretary of State feel that those businesses should have their vehicles confiscated, alongside any other assets that they use to facilitate this unacceptable practice?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman, like me, is tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Therefore, we will give consideration to his recommendation in the review that is being led by Lizzie Noel.
Plastic Waste Recycling

7. Liz Twist (Blaydon) (Lab): What recent estimate he has made of the amount of plastic waste that the UK sends overseas for recycling.

9. Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): What steps he is taking to reduce the amount of plastic waste that the UK sends overseas for recycling.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs estimates that in 2017 there were exports of 661,000 tonnes, compared with 790,000 the year before. Since China banned imports of certain plastic waste at the start of this year, exports to China have fallen significantly, but exports to other countries have risen. We want to ensure more and better-quality plastics recycling in the UK, and we will set out measures for this in our resources and waste strategy later this year.

Liz Twist: Will the Minister give the House more detail on the likely impact on UK plastic pollution of China's and Thailand's decision to restrict UK dry recycling imports?

Dr Coffey: As I said, exports to China have fallen drastically, but other countries such as Turkey and Vietnam have taken on more of the plastic waste. Our issue has been more with the paper waste that China used to take from us. It is proving a challenge to get the price that it used to attract.

Jessica Morden: Wales has the best recycling rate in the UK and the second best in Europe, and the Welsh Labour Government have the stated aim of being the first "refill nation". Could not the Department learn a lot from Wales, including on plastics that we send abroad, and incorporate that in the upcoming resources and waste strategy for England?

Dr Coffey: Indeed. I give credit to the Welsh Government for their progress, as I have at the EU Environment Council in the past, and I assure the hon. Lady that we have been looking carefully at what they are doing.

Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab): It is vital that we recycle more of our plastic waste here at home and create jobs and growth in every nation and region of this great country. I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to my Committee yesterday to recycle half of England's 35 million asthma inhalers by 2020, not only because of the damaging plastic but because of the damaging fluorinated gases—greenhouse gases—that they release into the atmosphere. Will the Minister enshrine the principle of extended producer responsibility into law through the waste strategy so that more producers are responsible for the waste they produce?

Dr Coffey: Extended producer responsibility is already part of the legal framework that exists today. I assure the hon. Lady that EPR and the PRN—packaging recovery note—are being very carefully looked at, but she will have to wait until later in the year.

Farming: Environmentally Sustainable Produce

10. Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): What steps he is taking to enable farmers to grow produce in a more environmentally sustainable way.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Michael Gove): The Department have pledged to work with farmers, food producers and environmental experts across Britain to devise a new agri-environment scheme to be introduced in the next Parliament.

Colin Clark: What provisions is my right hon. Friend's Department making to maintain high environmental standards in farming in case of no deal?

Michael Gove: The Department is undertaking significant steps to ensure that high environmental standards are maintained not just in farming but across the piece in the event of the country leaving the European Union in March 2019 without a deal, but of course it remains the commitment of this Government to secure the best possible deal for Britain.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): Will the Secretary of State support the recommendations of the agroforestry review by the Soil Association and the Woodland Trust and put on-farm tree planting at the centre of any environmental land management scheme?

Michael Gove: We absolutely recognise the vital importance of integrating forestry with farming on appropriate sites and at appropriate times.

Leaving the EU: Food Quality Standards

11. Danielle Rowley (Midlothian) (Lab): What plans the Government have to maintain UK standards on food quality and safety in trade agreements concluded after the UK leaves the EU.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): As a country, we are proud of our high food safety and animal welfare standards, and we have no intention of undermining our reputation for quality by lowering our food and animal welfare standards in pursuit of trade deals.

Danielle Rowley: The Government are demonstrating today that they are happy to roll out the red carpet for unpalatable arrivals from the US, so can the Minister confirm that the Prime Minister's Chequers agreement means that we will hold a stronger line when it comes to rejecting chlorinated chicken imports?

George Eustice: The existing food safety provisions on issues such as chlorinated chicken will come across through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. We have always been clear that we will not water down our standards in pursuit of trade deals. The general approach is that if one is a guest in another country seeking to do business there, then one should adopt and abide by the customs and rules in those markets. That is what we do when we seek access to foreign markets, and that is what countries will have to do when they seek access to our markets.
Air Quality

12. **Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): What are the implications of the Government’s abysmal response to the UN’s report on air quality of the UK’s seriously poor air quality, citing the fact that we are now on course to miss the fourth and fifth carbon budgets. Many of us struggle to breathe due to air pollution, and around 50,000 people die prematurely each year, while the Government have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds defending their record in the courts. When will they get a grip and put forward a workable and funded air quality strategy for the sake of my residents in York?

**Dr Coffey:** Overall air quality has actually been improving, and the hon. Lady will be aware that our legal challenge is on roadside nitrogen dioxide concentration. I am sure she will want to respond to the clean air strategy, which is ambitious and will achieve a lot of the outcomes we all want, wherever we live in this country, so that we have better air.

13. [906425] **Nigel Huddleston** (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): What more can the Government do to promote more environmentally friendly diesel fuel and diesel vehicles?

**Dr Coffey:** The Government’s “road to zero” strategy, published earlier this week, provides clarity on the role that cleaner diesel vehicles can play in reducing carbon dioxide emissions and meeting ever more stringent air quality standards. My hon. Friend will be aware that we continue to have the policy to end the sale of new conventional diesel and petrol cars and vans by 2040.

14. [906426] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): As the Minister has just acknowledged, diesel road vehicles are one of the primary causes of air pollution. Reducing our reliance on cars would not only reduce harmful emissions but help to tackle climate change, congestion and noise pollution. Those are problems not just in urban areas but in rural areas. Is she aware of the Campaign for National Parks research into making car-free travel to and within our national parks easier? Will she support its call for a smarter travel national park pilot?

**Dr Coffey:** I am not aware of that call about the national parks, but I am sure that the hon. Lady recognises the £3.5 billion being invested in improving air quality—a lot of it in changing transport mode to more buses, which I know she is a fan of, and through more cycling and walking. We continue to want to implement that.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): The tragic death of a nine-year-old is the first death to be directly linked to illegal levels of air pollution. The lawyer representing the family has said: “The Government has willingly presided over illegal EU air quality limits since 2010 and this ongoing failure is costing lives.” Does the Secretary of State agree?

**Dr Coffey:** The death from asthma of Ella Kissi-Debrah is absolutely tragic. It is important to say that this is part of an ongoing legal assessment, and it has not yet been conclusively linked to air pollution, but I am fully aware of the impact that poor air quality can have, and that is why this Government are acting on it.

**Sue Hayman:** According to UNICEF, more than 4.5 million children in the UK are growing up in areas with toxic levels of air pollution. It is unacceptable that the most vulnerable members of society, who contribute the least to air pollution, are the ones suffering most from its effect. Will the Minister accept that this is a children’s health crisis? What urgent targeted action and funding to reduce child exposure have the Government committed to?

**Dr Coffey:** I recognise that this is a challenge, and that is why the Government are addressing it so clearly. The clean air strategy has come out, and the issue that UNICEF refers to is particulate matter. Under current EU rules, we are not in any way breaching the levels set out, but we have recognised that we have to take action. Some 40% of particulate matter comes from domestic burning, which is why we will be consulting on measures later this summer.

Topical Questions

T1. [906427] **Sir Patrick McLoughlin** (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs** (Michael Gove): The future of food production has to be at the heart of DEFRA’s work. That is why I am very pleased that, in conversations I have been having over the past two weeks with our lead non-executive director, Henry Dimbleby, he says he is drawing up plans to envisage how a food strategy can operate across Government. I look forward to updating colleagues on the progress of that work.

**Sir Patrick McLoughlin:** I very much welcome the appointment of Julian Glover to do a review of national parks. Will my right hon. Friend say when he expects that review to report? Does he agree that it is very important that national parks are not held back to become museums, but become thriving places for people to invest and develop houses in the right places?

**Michael Gove:** I am grateful for my right hon. Friend’s comments. He is absolutely right; Julian Glover is an outstanding individual who I know will conduct a superb piece of work, which we expect to publish in the latter
half of next year. My right hon. Friend is also right to say that the reason our national parks are so successful is that they are not museums; they are active, working places, and individuals make sure that they are places of beauty that draw so many visitors, but are also places of food production and economic activity.

T5. [906433] Graham Stringer (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): A recent paper by the International Solid Waste Association has shown that much of the plastic we declare as recycled, when it is exported to China and other Asian countries, ends up in rivers and accounts for at least 25% of the plastic pollution going into the seas. Is the Secretary of State aware of that, and what action does he intend to take to improve the situation?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): The Environment Agency is the regulator in this regard, and operators are bound to ensure that what is exported gets recycled appropriately. I have not looked at that report yet, but I am happy to look into this and write to the hon. Gentleman.

T2. [906428] Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State visited my constituency last month, he met some outstanding members of both Radnorshire and Breconshire young farmers clubs. Will he confirm both to them and to the House that those young farmers have a future in farming post Brexit?

Michael Gove: I remember my visit to Wales with affection, and I am very much looking forward to revisiting my hon. Friend’s constituency, I hope, in under a fortnight’s time for the royal Welsh show. Those young farmers are outstanding young men and women, and it is my responsibility to make sure that their commitment both to food production and to high environmental standards is supported at every level. May I also congratulate the Welsh Government on their proposals for providing support for farming in the future? I look forward to working with them.

Dr Rupa Huq (Ealing Central and Acton) (Lab): The Secretary of State scored a major coup in being the first to interview President-elect Trump. As the Secretary of State has since become a born-again green and the President will touch down on these shores today, will the Secretary of State use all his famous skills of tact and persuasion, as well as that pre-existing special relationship, to impress on the President that climate change is an existential threat to our planet and to persuade him to reverse his disastrous decision to pull out of the Paris climate change accords?

Michael Gove: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for being so generous about some of the activities I undertook when I had a sabbatical from the Front Bench earlier in this Parliament. Of course, she is very flattering. I do not know that I have the diplomatic skills to bring the President of the United States into the same space that she and I are in when it comes to fighting climate change, but believe me, I will do my best.

Mr Speaker: The Secretary of State should not undersell himself; he really should not. Do not break the habit of a lifetime.

T3. [906430] Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con): What steps are the Government taking to help farmers and rural businesses in Cheshire to boost their productivity?

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Earlier this year, we invited calls to a small grants scheme to promote farm productivity. It was oversubscribed, so we have put in an additional £7 million, making a total of £23 million. We intend to have additional calls later this year.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): Yesterday, senior industry leaders were in Westminster as part of the Prince of Wales’s corporate leaders group, which is facilitated by the Cambridge-based Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership. Industry will be key in tackling the environmental challenges of the future, but when will the Government acknowledge that far from being a burden, intelligent regulation is the key to environmental innovation?

Michael Gove: I think the Government have always acknowledged that. In the spirit of your comments about not underselling myself, Mr Speaker, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the speech I gave at the Policy Exchange four weeks ago on the need to reform capitalism. I am afraid that that is something only the Conservatives would undertake, because while we can reform capitalism in the interests of the country, the hon. Gentleman’s right hon. Friend the leader of the Labour party would destroy capitalism and, with it, torpedo this country’s prosperity.

T4. [906432] Andrew Lewer (Northampton South) (Con): Given some worrying air quality hotspot alerts in my constituency and the projected significant increase in vehicle volume, what extra measures will the Department deploy to help my local authorities combat those pollution hotspots?

Dr Thérèse Coffey: The joint air quality unit provides advice to councils that are seeking support. I suggest that councils have many powers already, but this will largely be a case of working closely with the county council to try to make sure that the traffic flows, and I am sure that that will improve air quality in my hon. Friend’s area.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: It seems only right, in Environment questions, to call someone called Mr Ben Lake.

Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC): Diolch, Mr Speaker. What consideration has the Secretary of State made of ways in which the UK Government might intervene to alleviate the pressures faced by farmers across Wales as a consequence of the recent dry weather, particularly the pressures on the already dwindling fodder reserves?

George Eustice: We will hold discussions with our colleagues in the devolved Administrations on those issues. Only a few months ago we sought and achieved a derogation from the EU linked to wet weather. I am now aware that in many parts of the country, including
England and Wales, there are issues linked to dry weather, and we are considering seeking derogations from certain schemes to take account of that problem.

Sir Oliver Heald: My right hon. Friend will be aware of the happy news that Finn’s law, the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Bill, achieved its Second Reading last week. Once enacted, it will make it easier to convict people who attack police dogs and other service animals. The Secretary of State has consulted on increasing the sentence for such attacks to five years’ imprisonment. Is it possible to have an update on the timetable for that sentence for such attacks to five years’ imprisonment.

Michael Gove: I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend on his tenacity and success in ensuring that service animals will be better protected as a result of the Bill that he is bringing forward. We want to ensure better protection for all God’s creatures, which is why we will bring forward proposals to increase the sentences available to the courts for those who commit the most extreme acts of animal cruelty.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Has the Secretary of State made any progress in understanding what is happening on our farming land and in our countryside that causes so many species of birds and other animals to disappear?

Michael Gove: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The farmland bird index shows that over the past 30 or 40 years there has been a precipitous decline in some species, although there has been an increase in others. Many factors are at work—sometimes the way the land has been farmed has had an impact, but there are also other factors, including climate change. At the Environmental Audit Committee yesterday the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) raised a number of issues that we need to address, including through education, to ensure that conservation, biodiversity and environmental enhancement are valued not just by the Government but by us all.

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): In a rural area such as west Oxfordshire, the livelihood of farmers is of enormous importance, as is leaving our environment in a better state than we found it. What are Ministers doing to ensure that farmers are protected while improving our environment?

Michael Gove: My Department and Ministers personally carry out extensive consultation with farmers and those who work alongside them. In the agricultural shows that I have had the opportunity to visit over the course of this summer, and in meetings with the National Farmers Union and others, I have been struck by the commitment that farmers have not just to food production, but to the highest environmental standards for the future.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): I do not know whether the Environment Secretary has had a chance to look at Oxfam’s excellent new report, “Behind the Barcode”, which looks at modern slavery and human rights abuses in the food supply chain. I know that it is not his primary responsibility to consider issues such as modern slavery, but given that it is so prevalent in our food system, what conversations has he had with his colleagues about trying to stamp it out?

Michael Gove: I have had conversations with the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Home Secretary about ensuring that high standards are maintained—not just environmental standards, but also social and labour protection standards—at every stage in the food chain. I will endeavour to look at that report and ensure that my colleagues across Government are acquainted with its contents.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): What assessment has the Minister made of the impact of the current weather on farmers across the country, on future food prices, and particularly on the viability of small farms?

George Eustice: As I said earlier, there have been challenges with the dry weather, particularly for cereal crops that in some cases are having to be harvested early. There may be a knock-on impact on the availability of winter forage and straw, so we continue to monitor the situation closely. Farmers are used to weather events, which are a common feature of agriculture. Just a few months ago we had too much wet weather, and we now face problems with dry weather.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): The plastics industry in Corby is not only a significant employer but it is keen to engage with the Government and try to identify solutions and innovate around the issue of non-recyclable plastics. What steps will the Government take to foster that engagement?

Dr Coffey: I and my officials have met a variety of companies to discuss this issue, and if they feel that they have not yet been consulted, I would be more than happy to hear from them.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Ordination Numbers

1. Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress the Church of England has made on its target to increase ordinations by 2020; and what proportion of recent new ordinands are women.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): I would first like to congratulate all those ordained deacon or priest last month. Within the hon. Lady’s diocese of York, four women and three men were ordained priest, alongside eight women and two men who were ordained deacon. Nationally, the Church of England is on target to increase the number of people who are recommended for training in 2020 by 50%.

Diana Johnson: I thank the right hon. Lady for that answer—it is good to hear that the stained glass ceiling is being well and truly smashed. However, is it not about time that, in the evolution of the established Church of England, the special arrangements that were put in place for those who do not accept the equality and ministry of women were abandoned?
Dame Caroline Spelman: The Church has come to an accommodation on that issue. I think that the gradual increase in the number of women who are coming into ministry, and people’s experience of being ministered to by a female priest, is in itself changing social attitudes in a holistic way. I expect to see more and more women coming into post, and therefore more and more people getting used to seeing them there.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): What are the main barriers to women becoming ordinands in the Church of England?

Dame Caroline Spelman: There are no barriers to women becoming ordinands in the Church of England. As I have just explained, there has been a sharp increase in the number of women coming into ministry, and the overall number of ordinands entering training has increased by 14% over the past two years. The number of women under the age of 32 entering training has actually increased by 27%, which shows that it is an increasingly attractive vocation for younger women who look forward to a career in the Church as a female priest.

Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I hear what the right hon. Lady says, but will she also consider the impact of the number of churches that new ordinands have to look after? It is a real worry, given the pressure we are putting on these poor people, particularly if they are not full time, in order to carry out their ministry.

Dame Caroline Spelman: It is obviously a pressure for male and female priests, who might find themselves in charge of eight or 10 very small, rural ministries. The Church has looked at how sustainable that is, and the status of some churches has been changed to that of festival churches, which are open only on the high days and holy days of Christmas and Easter, to try to ensure that the workload is sustainable. It is something the Church Commissioners have very much in mind, alongside training more ordinands.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Electronic Voting Systems

2. Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): To ask the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, what representations the Commission has received on the potential installation of electronic voting systems in the Chamber as part of the (a) restoration and renewal programme and (b) northern estate programme. [906398]

4. Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): To ask the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, what representations the Commission has received on the potential installation of electronic voting systems in the Chamber as part of the (a) restoration and renewal programme and (b) northern estate programme. [906400]

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): The Commission has received various oral representations in previous Question Times. At its meeting on 14 May 2018, and in the absence of any House determination of a change in voting procedure, the Commission endorsed a plan for a House of Commons decant that envisages a Commons decant Chamber and two Division Lobbies, on the basis of a like-for-like layout, with adjustments to improve accessibility for Members and visitors to the Public Gallery. It will be a matter for the shadow sponsor board, once appointed, to consult on the requirements of the Palace. The procedures of the House remain the responsibility of the House itself.

Alan Brown: Last week MPs were concerned that multiple votes interrupted their watching of the England match, but the more fundamental issue is that multiple votes eat into valuable debating time, as happened with the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. We were left only 15 minutes for a so-called debate on the UK Government’s power grab. Surely it is time to consider electronic voting, and the decant could be the first step in that process, instead of having a like-for-like, outdated set-up.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, I remind the House that it is a matter for the Procedure Committee. Members who ask me this question should perhaps make a submission to the Procedure Committee so that it can consider their proposal.

Drew Hendry: Is the opportunity of Government Back Benchers to have a cosy chat in the Division Lobby with Ministers a good enough reason to maintain the antiquated voting system, which costs not only a huge amount of money but a great deal of valuable parliamentary time?

Tom Brake: I suppose that matter would be entirely appropriate for him to include in the submission to the Procedure Committee as perhaps a reason why the House might want to change its procedures on this issue.

Palace of Westminster: Repair and Refurbishment

3. Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): To ask the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, what recent estimate the Commission has made of the cost of repairing and refurbishing the Palace of Westminster. [906399]

Tom Brake: The Commission has made no such estimate. It will be for the sponsor board and delivery authority, which the two Houses agreed earlier this year to establish, to develop a proposed scope of works and budget for agreement by Parliament.

Deidre Brock: With the eye-watering bill estimated so far for here, the similarly-eye watering bill for Buckingham Palace, and the biggest bill of all, the bill we will pay for Brexit, is it any wonder that the public are losing confidence in politicians? Is there not still time to decide to move out of London to a purpose-built modern Parliament with sensible things such as electronic voting? If not, is there at least a team looking at how to cut the cost of this nonsense?
Tom Brake: I am sure that the hon. Lady will be aware that the possibility of moving out of London has been considered. The joint Commission that was set up through both Houses looked at that matter and dismissed it as a proposal. The sponsor body and the delivery authority will have responsibility for making sure that the costs of the project are kept to a minimum while delivering a prestigious project on a world heritage building.

Sir Patrick McLoughlin (Derbyshire Dales) (Con): Is that not exactly the point? This is a world heritage building and if it was in the ownership of any individual, the state would require them to keep it up to a certain standard. That is exactly what we have to do as the owners of this building.

Tom Brake: Of course we have to. I am sure that Members on both sides of the House will want to ensure that the sponsor body and the delivery authority between them deliver exactly the sort of project that the right hon. Gentleman set out.

**Electoral Commission Committee**

The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

**Referendum Rules**

5. Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): To ask the hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker’s Committee on the Electoral Commission, what proposals the Electoral Commission has for changing the rules on referendums.

[906401]

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South): After the June 2016 referendum, the Electoral Commission recommended improvements to modernise electoral law. Recommendations covered the consolidation of referendum legislation, the regulated period, rules for campaigning and sanctions. The Commission also recently recommended changes to improve the transparency of digital campaigning at future referendums and elections. Further details can be found on its website.

Dame Cheryl Gillan: I thank the hon. Lady for her answer. She is obviously aware that questions surrounding changes to the rules on elections and referendums are at the heart of some of the political reform debates that are currently occurring here and around the world. Is she aware that this week, the University College London Constitution Unit, under the leadership of Professor Meg Russell and Dr Alan Renwick, has published the results of the Independent Commission on Referendums, which has been sitting for the last nine months? Will the hon. Lady look at the recommendations in the report and see whether she can add those to the list of reforms that this House must consider before another referendum is held?

Bridget Phillipson: I am very grateful to the right hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South for her question. The Electoral Commission welcomed the report that she refers to and shares the view that the Government must take steps to modernise electoral law, especially on transparency and digital campaigning. It chimes with the Electoral Commission’s report on digital campaigning concerning areas such as misinformation, the misuse of personal data and overseas influence. I am sure that she will continue to impress on Ministers the need for action.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): If the ultimate findings of the Electoral Commission investigation into law-breaking by the leave campaign are as serious as the version that was leaked disgracefully by the leave campaign, will my hon. Friend make it absolutely clear to the Electoral Commission that this House and the public will expect full criminal investigations by the police and the National Crime Agency into this alleged wrongdoing, so that the public can have confidence in the integrity of our referendum and electoral system?

Bridget Phillipson: The Commission has repeatedly called for an increase to the maximum penalty that it can impose on political parties and other campaigners for a breach of the rules. On the investigation that my right hon. Friend refers to, the Vote Leave organisation took an unusual step in sharing its views on the Electoral Commission’s initial findings. The Commission will give due consideration to any further representations made and will, at the earliest opportunity, publish a thorough and detailed closing report to provide a full and balanced account both to the public and to Parliament.

**Church Commissioners**

6. Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Church of England is taking to encourage the development of creative learning in its primary schools.

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman): As the largest provider of education in England, with 4,700 schools, the Church’s “Vision for Education” sets out a commitment to educate the whole child. That includes nurturing “academic habits and skills…and creativity across the whole range of school subjects”. This involves a commitment to educating for character rather than a sole focus on academic subjects.

Mr Sheerman: Those are words that give me great encouragement, but is the right hon. Lady aware that in many schools the art of creating and making things has almost disappeared with the abolition of design and technology from the curriculum? Will she look into the Victoria and Albert museum’s new education foundation? It is doing very interesting work on making things in schools—and, of course, it is led by a chap called Tristram Hunt.

Dame Caroline Spelman: That is a name with which we are all familiar. I found that the only way of maintaining any sort of control in a Sunday school class was to do arts and crafts, which seemed to absorb everyone. I am a strong advocate of that kind of practical creativity, but I will certainly look into what the V&A is advocating.
Modern Day Slavery

7. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress the Church of England is taking to educate school children on that issue. [906403]

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: I am very grateful for that question, because it allows me to pay tribute to the work of the Bishop of Derby, who has just announced his retirement, but who has been the Church of England lead in the House of Lords in tackling modern-day slavery. It was Bishop Alastair who pioneered the idea of creating an information pack for children in schools so that they could understand the horror of the history of slavery and this country’s involvement in it. He did that in the diocese of Derby, but we have learnt a great deal from it, and the scale of the initiative will now be extended.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): On a recent visit to Romania, the ministry in charge of Romanians abroad was very concerned about the number of women who were being trafficked for sexual purposes across the European Union and the number of children who were being forced into modern-day slavery. What more can the Church do to highlight the problem and combat it?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: The Church of England has always had a great heart for the marginalised, the excluded and the vulnerable. Through the “We see you” campaign, we are starting to raise awareness in society of what we often do not see around us. The Church is working in all schools to raise children’s awareness of this modern form of slavery, together with the charity Just Enough UK—as much as anything, to help them to protect themselves from becoming victims.

8. **Chris Davies** (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what advice is being made available to churches to better protect their buildings against metal theft. [906404]

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: Since I last answered a question on this subject in April the largest concentration of reported attacks on churches for metal theft has been in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. While we are starting to see small numbers of people being prosecuted for these crimes, the value of the thefts is considerable and the cost of replacement and repair is high.

**Chris Davies**: Can my right hon. Friend confirm what partners the Church of England is working with to tackle metal thefts across its parishes?

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: The Church cannot do this on its own, and it works very closely with Historic England, the police and its insurers alongside the Home Office in order to provide advice and guidance to its parishes. All dioceses now advise their churches to install deterrents such as alarms and cameras. I am pleased to say that the Church in Wales similarly endorsed Historic England’s metal theft guidance.

Inter-faith Dialogue

9. **John Grogan** (Keighley) (Lab): To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent steps the Church of England has taken to promote inter-faith dialogue. [906405]

**Dame Caroline Spelman**: The Church of England continues to take active steps at local and international level to promote inter-faith dialogue. The Church works through organisations like the Council of Christians and Jews and the Christian Muslim Forum alongside close working with the Office of the Chief Rabbi and senior Muslim clerics.

**John Grogan**: Does the right hon. Lady agree that many Church schools, both C of E and Catholic, with multi-faith intakes, such as Our Lady of Victories Catholic
School Keighley, pupils from which came down to Parliament last week, including many Muslim pupils, bind our communities together from a young age and teach respect for others?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I could not agree more. Church of England schools are open to the whole community and reflect the demographic profile of the community they serve. Thus in some parts of the country 80% or 90% of pupils in a Church of England school may be Muslim. If you will forgive me, Mr Speaker, I would like to commend what the new Home Secretary had to say about his own education as a Muslim in a Church of England school, and how important a part of his own upbringing was an awareness of religious literacy in our world today.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Speaker:** It might be thought to be a helpful prompt if I advise the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) that inter-faith dialogue can embrace the subject of the evils of modern-day slavery, in which I know she has an intense interest.

**Fiona Bruce (Congleton) (Con):** I was very pleased to hear my right hon. Friend’s response to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Dorset and North Poole (Michael Tomlinson). Does she agree that trafficking women into prostitution is a most heinous form of violence against women and girls and that, if we are to review the law on prostitution, a priority must be to improve exit strategies for these exploited women?

**Mr Speaker:** And one would assume that it was a matter that fell within the rubric of inter-faith dialogue.

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** We need to understand, in the world today more than ever, the different faiths of the world and their tenets, and be respectful of the fact that 84% of the world’s population adhere to one of the great religions of the world. By working through religious institutions in all these countries, which should all condemn outright slavery in all its forms, I hope that we can work together internationally to bring an end to the terrible exploitation to which my hon. Friend refers.

### Church Building

12. **Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab):** To ask the right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, what progress the Church of England is making on building new churches in London. [906408]

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** This is a bit of good news. The Church Commissioners have made £27 million available for the creation of up to 100 new churches. I am pleased to say that eight new churches are to be created across all the London diocese, and already 100 new worshipping communities meet outside formal church buildings in a fresh expression of “church.”

**Stephen Timms:** Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the Church of England is now building its first new church buildings in London since the 1950s to accommodate not decline, which is widely understood to be what is going on, but a very sharp increase in the number of people attending public worship?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I can do a bit of myth busting here. The Church is not in fact closing more churches than it is opening; interestingly, it is opening almost as many new ones as we are needing to close older ones. But that is often to serve gaps in provision and new communities. At the recent Synod I attended over the weekend in York there was an interesting fringe meeting about the planting of new churches on estates and evangelism on estates. We often build new housing developments, but we do not put a church community building in the heart of those communities. That is why the commissioners have seen fit to make extra resources available for the creation of new churches in areas where demand is high.
Immigration: Pausing the Hostile Environment

10.34 am

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab) (Urgent Question): May I ask the Minister of State if she will make a statement on the decision to pause the hostile environment and to slip that information out during the World cup last night?

Mr Speaker: One is supposed to read out the precise terms of the question, but the right hon. Gentleman indulged in a degree of poetic licence before I had the chance to stop him. Very good.

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): I welcome the opportunity to respond to this question, and I want to make our position very clear. We have put in place additional safeguards to ensure that legal migrants are not inadvertently caught up by measures designed to tackle illegal migration. It is right that we make a clear distinction between those who are here legally and those who are not. We have made it clear that it is not acceptable that those of the Windrush generation have been impacted negatively, and this Government have apologised.

We are keeping under constant review the safeguards that were immediately put in place. We have introduced a temporary pause in the proactive sharing of Home Office data with other organisations, including banks and building societies, for the purpose of controlling access to services. Data on persons over 30 has been excluded from sharing, to ensure that members of the Windrush generation are not inadvertently affected. This is a temporary measure. We are also providing additional support to landlords, employers and public service providers through the Home Office checking service to ensure that we are not impacting the Windrush generation. We have issued new guidance that encourages employers and landlords to get in touch with the Home Office checking service if a Commonwealth citizen does not have the documents they need to demonstrate their status. We have issued similar guidance to other Government Departments providing public services.

The Home Secretary has said that it is his top priority to right the wrongs that have occurred. A lessons learned review, which will have independent oversight, will help to ensure that we have a clear picture of what went wrong and of how we should take this forward. We are carrying out a historical review of removals and detentions. At the same time, our taskforce is helping to ensure that those who have struggled to demonstrate their right to be here are supported to do so, and we have committed to setting up a compensation scheme.

Mr Lammy: It is important to put on record the fact that immigration has brought considerable benefits to this country. We saw last night in England’s World Cup team 11 of the players from black or mixed-race heritage backgrounds. That is a tribute to the modern diversity of this country. When the Secretary of State took up his position a few weeks ago, he said that he wanted a decent system, a fair system and a system that treated people with respect. Is it respectful to slip out this information during yesterday’s World Cup spectacle? Is it respectful for the Minister’s Department still not to be able to tell us how many people have been detained? Is it respectful not to have any information about a transparent hardship scheme for those who are still in trouble? Is it respectful to have said nothing about whether the Minister is going to allow for a proper appeals system?

Will the Minister confirm that these changes are not just for the Windrush generation and that they are in fact for everyone who has been affected by the hostile environment? She talks about a “pause”, but why not scrap the hostile environment that is bringing this country into disrepute? Will she also confirm that we will no longer be asking teachers, nurses, doctors and landlords to act as the country’s border enforcement in the months and years ahead?

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Gentleman has raised a number of important points. First, I want to make it clear that it was the former Home Secretary who requested the pausing of proactive data sharing with other Government Departments, and that that started in April. That is a temporary measure. However, the data sharing cannot be recommenced without my ministerial consent, and it is certainly not something that we will begin again until we are confident that we will not be impacting members of the Windrush generation further.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned hardship, and of course our first priority has been to help people to secure their status through the taskforce. We have put in place a dedicated team for vulnerable people, whom we are linking up with other public sector bodies to ensure that they get the support they need. I chaired a cross-ministerial group early on in all this, and I was impressed by the steps that the Department for Work and Pensions in particular had taken to ensure that those affected would be able to have their benefits reinstated, indeed retrospectively, from the moment that they demonstrated that they had an appointment with the Windrush taskforce.

When conducting our review of those who may have been detained, it is important that we are meticulous. It would be wrong to come out with a number that we were not confident about and we will ensure that, as soon as we have figures that we are content are accurate, which will go through the same independent assurance process that we used for removals, they will be made available to the House.

The taskforce’s first priority is to ensure that those who are assisted achieve status, and that has happened in the vast majority of cases. Those over whom some question remains will have access to an administrative review and, in due course, could proceed to a judicial review if that were appropriate. Obviously, we do not want it to come to that.

As I have said previously and as the Home Secretary has made clear, we have sought to ensure that mitigations are in place for the measures that are within the compliant environment that have impacted the Windrush generation. As I said earlier, we have paused proactive data sharing for all nationalities for people over 30. However, it is important to reflect that compliant environment policies commenced a significant time ago under a previous Labour Administration, and it is also important that this Government have ways of identifying those who are actively accessing services in this country to which they are not entitled.
Mr John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): The right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) deserves the praise and has the admiration of the whole House for how he has championed the Windrush generation, and he is of course right that this was an outrage. However, does the Minister appreciate that that generation, who came here believing this to be, in the words of the shadow Home Secretary, their “mother country” and who are proud patriots, take just as dim a view as any of the rest of us of those who behave illegally or improperly? The point is that the Windrush generation were not illegal or improper and that they do not condone illegality. In doing right by the Windrush generation and being unrelenting in their defence, will the Minister be equally unrelenting in dealing with people who abuse the system and try to cheat them and us?

Caroline Nokes: As the right hon. Lady will know, Martin Forde QC has been appointed as the independent adviser to the compensation scheme. His call for evidence has closed and has greatly informed the shape of the consultation, which will be forthcoming very soon. She raised the compliant environment controls, which have been introduced over many years: right to work checks in 1997; controls on benefits in 1999 and on social care in 2002; civil penalties for employers of illegal workers in 2008; and more recent measures, including on the private rented sector, bank accounts and driving licences in the Immigration Acts of 2014 and 2016.

The right hon. Lady raised the issue of people who have been in detention and those who may have been removed from the country. The Home Secretary provided information when he appeared before the Home Affairs Select Committee and confirmed that current indications were that 63 people had been removed, but those figures are subject to the independent oversight that we will put in place in due course, and that will of course be properly independent. As I said in my answer to the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), we will not come forward with the numbers of people detained until we are confident, through the manual review of all cases, that we have the right numbers.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): It is with great sadness on both sides of the House that we reflect on how some people from the Windrush generation have been treated and seriously let down by our immigration system, whether it has been a Labour, a Conservative or a coalition Government in office. I am pleased that the Minister is now trying to bring transparency and compassion to this area, but will she confirm that people who made their lives here but have now retired back to their country of origin are free to return to this country at any time?

Caroline Nokes: Absolutely yes. This is one of the areas we have considered, and we have made it clear that those who have retired overseas can return and that those who simply wish to come back and visit would have easy access to visitor visas. The most humbling meeting I have had in my role as Immigration Minister was in Southampton, where members of the Windrush generation set up a meeting that Home Office officials was in Southampton, where members of the Windrush generation were in denial. We have to rent scheme? The scheme requires landlords to carry out immigration checks, and it has led to half of landlords being reluctant to rent to people without a UK passport. Will she confirm this insidious measure will not be

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This pause is a small, welcome step, but it is nothing more than that. Finally, it is an admission of the hostile environment that the Government have created, about which they were in denial.

What is the Minister actually doing to scrap the right to rent scheme? The scheme requires landlords to carry out immigration checks, and it has led to half of landlords being reluctant to rent to people without a UK passport. Will she confirm this insidious measure will not be
rolled out in Scotland? Will she commit to a broader review of the hostile environment policies, as called for by the Home Affairs Committee? If not, tens of thousands of EU citizens who are not registered as having settled status in time will be among the next victims of this Government.

What is being done to prevent the next Windrush scandal, with thousands of children in the UK being priced out of access to citizenship documentation? Finally, when will the Government ditch their bogus immigration targets? Those false targets and false promises led to the hostile environment policies in the first place.

Caroline Nokes: The compliant environment is part of the Government’s drive to address illegal migration, to tackle those who seek to profit from it and to encourage migrants to comply with the rules and laws of the United Kingdom. The public expect us to enforce immigration laws, which have been approved by Parliament, as a matter of fairness to those who abide by the rules.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Members of the Windrush generation are in their 70s and 80s, and many of them feel extremely vulnerable. One concern that has been expressed to me by my constituents is that they may suddenly face deportation. What words of reassurance can my right hon. Friend give them that they should report their position, make sure their position is regularised and fulfil their destiny as British citizens, as they chose way back in the 1950s?

Caroline Nokes: It is an important point that we must provide reassurance and ensure that as many people as possible make contact with the taskforce. That is why we have been working closely with communities to make sure it is very clear that the taskforce has an attitude of helping individuals. I have been to the centre in Sheffield, and I heard people talking through individual phone calls. I listened both to the questions asked and to the very supportive responses given.

It is imperative that we focus on the numbers that have made contact. The taskforce has successfully responded to well over 8,000 calls, and more than 2,000 people have now secured their documentary status. In many cases, and we have seen some incredible stories on the news, those who have been through the process have found it helpful and have been able to provide reassurance to their family and friends. In many cases, those who have been through the process are the best advocates.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): I welcome this urgent question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), and I agree with the shadow Home Secretary on the need for a hardship fund, which the Home Affairs Committee has twice recommended because we have seen cases of people with huge debts who have been wronged by the British state and who cannot wait for the compensation scheme.

The Minister has referred to data sharing, but she did not refer to the police. Will she look again at the obligation on the police to report victims of crime? The Committee has raised serious concern that this is deterring victims of domestic violence and slavery from coming forward to report to the police, and it is allowing dangerous criminals to get away with it.

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Lady is right to indicate that we do not want any dangerous criminals to get away with anything. Where there are safeguarding issues, it is important that data can be shared, but we should be careful to do so on a proportionate basis.

On the hardship fund, I was particularly struck when I chaired the cross-departmental meeting by how proactive the DWP was being. I am very conscious that some people may well have been deprived of their benefits, and the DWP was immediately reinstating the benefits of those who have confirmed status or who have confirmed an appointment with the Windrush taskforce, but of course the DWP also has a duty to make sure that any back payments that are owed are also reinstated.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on how she is getting on top of this very important issue. She said that 2,000 people who have contacted the Windrush taskforce have received documents confirming the legality of their immigration status, but how many people in total have contacted the taskforce? For what proportion have we now established the correct documentation?

Caroline Nokes: So 2,125 individuals have had confirmation of status, which is done via a biometric residence permit. Many of them will then move on to apply for citizenship, and 584 individuals have been granted that to date. The taskforce has taken many thousands of telephone calls. Well over 8,000 call-backs have been made to people who have made contact in the first instance. I can confirm that more than 94% of people who have provided their information have had their status confirmed within the 14-day target, with many having this on the same day.

Marsha De Cordova (Battersea) (Lab): I, too, want to thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy) for his question. We have all seen the disastrous impact that the Government’s hostile environment policies have had on British citizens, so why are the Government just pausing these policies? Why are they not abandoning them? I want to echo my hon. Friends in saying that these people need a hardship fund and the Government must act to introduce it.

Caroline Nokes: I thank the hon. Lady for her questions. A lessons learned review, to be headed by Wendy Williams, has already been announced, and its terms of reference will be published. It will give independent oversight, which will help us to ensure that we have a clear picture of what went wrong and how we should take this forward. In the meantime, as Members have heard this morning, we are reviewing existing safeguards to make sure that those who are here lawfully are not inadvertently disadvantaged by measures put in place to tackle illegal migration. I have already made it clear that the Department for Work and Pensions is the lead Department in making sure that those who are in hardship have benefits both reinstated and backdated, but of course the compensation scheme will be the main mechanism via which individuals will be able to make sure that any compensation they are due is paid.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): I welcome the statement from the Minister and the Home Office today. She will be aware that the Windrush scandal is exactly that—a scandal. Those of us on the Select Committee on Home Affairs have questioned several Ministers on why it was...
allowed to occur without it being highlighted by the Home Office’s internal systems. There was a trend happening that seemed to go unnoticed by the Home Office and officials within it. Will she update the House on what is being done to ensure that future trends are noted far earlier, rather than having to be established through media requests and so on, as in the Windrush case?

Caroline Nokes: I thank my hon. Friend for the question. The lessons learned review is an important part of that, but my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been very clear that there is, and will be, a cultural change at the Home Office. We have to make sure that we are better at identifying such situations and responding with the appropriate speed. The lessons learned review will help us to understand what went wrong, and we most certainly are learning those lessons.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): The hostile environment has particular consequences for refugees, especially as the Liberal Democrat and Tory coalition Government scrapped the national refugee integration service, which had been set up by the previous Labour Government. Refugees have fled conflicts and war, and they deserve help, not hostility. So will the Minister agree to restore a national refugee strategy and service, and allow applicants the right to work if the Home Office fails to meet its own six-month service standard?

Caroline Nokes: The honourable Lady will, of course, be aware of the integration Green Paper, which is being led by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. In the past few weeks, I have had a number of meetings and conversations with leading charities working in the refugee sector. I am very conscious of the need for us to make sure that refugee communities are given the support—the English language teaching—that they need to be able to integrate. I have a particular focus on the measures we must take to help those with status into work.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): I thank the Minister for the statement. Will she update the House on the work of the independently overseen review?

Caroline Nokes: Wendy Williams has been appointed to the lessons learned review, and I am optimistic that the terms of reference will be forthcoming very shortly indeed. It is an important review and its findings will be published. I am absolutely confident that Wendy Williams will bring integrity to the review and give it the external scrutiny that it requires.

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The hostile environment is just one indication of the negative mindset that has shaped Home Office policy and thinking on immigration for years now. We have seen the cost of visa applications going through the roof, the very poor standard of first-instance decision making and the removal of rights of appeal. During this pause, will the Government look at immigration policies in the round and ensure that we have a more constructive and positive debate in future on the contribution that immigration can make to our economy?

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Gentleman makes a really important point. Too often, the discussions around immigration are coloured by the tabloid press. In due course, both a White Paper and a Bill on immigration will come forward. I sincerely hope that we will be able to have reasoned and intelligent debates in this House, because it is important that we have an immigration system that works in the interests of not only our economy but our society and, most importantly, people.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Yesterday, I met representatives of Roma support groups who advised me of circumstances in which Roma are being encouraged—sometimes financially induced or pressured—to leave the country because they have no fixed abode or cannot produce a residence card. The Minister will know that they have every right to be here under EU freedom of movement rules. Will she take steps to ensure that this practice is ceased immediately?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady raises a really important point. She will be absolutely conscious, as I am, that EU citizens have every right to be here under free movement rules. I am conscious that we need to focus our efforts on those who do not have a legal right to be here and make sure that those who are inadvertently caught up in any policy are given absolutely the right assistance and information that they need. There are particular challenges regarding those who may be homeless. An excellent cross-departmental taskforce, led by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, is currently working on homelessness. It is important that we get our policies right in that respect.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): If the Government are not trying to avoid setting up a hardship fund, why the delay?

Caroline Nokes: The Government are setting up a compensation scheme and it is absolutely right that we consult on that before so doing. Martin Forde’s call for evidence received a great deal of information—indeed, excess of 600 pieces of evidence. As I have already said, the DWP is the lead Department for making sure that those who were entitled to benefits and may have been denied them have them not only reinstated immediately but backdated.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister might not know that we have a substantial Caribbean community in Huddersfield, mainly from Grenada and Jamaica—indeed, some of my Opposition colleagues have links to the community. Two people from that community came to see me in the House of Commons yesterday. They are very concerned, and not only about the insecurity that many of the older generation feel. A lot of fly-by-night lawyers and so-called experts are able to charge a lot of money to intercede, because many of these people are frightened of coming to their Member of Parliament in case information goes back to DWP. Please be aware of the movement rules. Will she take steps to ensure that this does not happen?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman is always a forceful advocate for his own constituents. Throughout the Windrush crisis, I have seen Members of Parliament
from all parties interceding and acting with great speed and compassion. It is essential that we convey a message of reassurance, which is what I sought to do when I attended a drop-in surgery with members of the Caribbean community in Southampton. Individual Members of Parliament are very well placed to do that, but it is absolutely the case that individuals can contact the taskforce without any need to approach immigration lawyers or advisers. I strongly recommend that they do that rather than approach a lawyer.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Do we not need to learn a much bigger lesson? Mr Speaker is descended from Romanian Jews. The former Foreign Secretary’s great grandfather was Turkish. The Agars, the Jardines, the Poulters and the Villiers all came over with the Normans. The de Bois and the Corbyns came over with the Huguenots. The Gillans, the Bryants, the Brennans, the Keegans, the Donelans and many others are, frankly, in the end Irish. Is not the truth of the matter that not a single Member of this House has pure, pure British blood and that we should rejoice in the fact that we are all the children of immigrants?

Caroline Nokes: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. I am sure that he was desperately trying to work out where Nokes came from. [Interruption.] I do not know. It is my ex-husband’s name. It is really important that we acknowledge, celebrate and recognise the contribution that immigrants have made to our country, to our community and to our society, and I do that. I hope that, over the coming months when we get to debate the immigration Bill, people will remember that.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Many of my constituents in Lewisham and Deptford have been victims of the hostile environment for far too long, waiting years for visas, not having service standards met and not being able to get any sort of update from the Home Office. Does the Minister accept that pausing the hostile environment is far too little and too late for many of my constituents in Lewisham and Deptford who have been victims of the hostile environment for far too long, of my constituents, and should not the Government now be ending it for good?

Caroline Nokes: The compliant environment provides some important policies that enable us to distinguish between those who are here legally and those who are not. As I said in response to an earlier question, this was something that commenced many years ago, under a different Government, and it is absolutely right that we should be able to check that those who are accessing benefits and services have the right to do so.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): In 2014-15, more than 40,000 overseas students lost their leave to remain in the UK because an American testing firm alleged that they had cheated in their English language test. Many of them were plunged into great hardship. It is now becoming clear that a significant proportion of those allegations were without foundation. Will the Minister now offer those students who, remarkably, have managed to stay here, a large group of whom were in the House yesterday, a new secure English test to establish fairly whether they can now resume their studies?

Caroline Nokes: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for that question. It is, of course, an issue that we are considering very carefully.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): This is not the only pause that the Immigration Minister has tried to sneak out in the past month. She admitted to me in a written answer on 4 June that she had paused deportation flights to the Caribbean. She said in her answer that this was because of the need for “added levels of assurance”. Some 991 flights were booked in the past year to deport individuals to the Caribbean. Why did she pause the flights? Will they remain paused? And how many of those 991 individuals does she now believe were deported wrongly?

Caroline Nokes: It is absolutely right that, at a time when we were looking very closely at whether anybody of the Windrush cohort had been negatively impacted, we paused flights to the Caribbean. It is important, going forward, that we look at those flights with utmost rigour, and we are determined to do so.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): In a Westminster Hall debate on 13 June, the Minister said that no one had successfully judicially reviewed the Government under paragraph 3225 of the immigration rules. Was that accurate, and have any cases been settled out of court?

Caroline Nokes: If the hon. Gentleman looks in the Library, he will find that I have provided clarification on that matter.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Can the Minister say whether she has issued any guidance to entry clearance officers about visitor visas? I have seen an upsurge in people who have been refused visitor visas. They have all the documentary evidence to fulfil the requirements of the immigration rules, but the disbelief of the entry clearance officer that they will not return to their home country seems to be the prevailing issue.

Caroline Nokes: It is important that entry clearance officers consider applications for visitor visas with the utmost rigour. Every year, we issue in the region of 3 million visas—I think that the figure is 2.7 million visas. As I said in Westminster Hall quite recently, I do not believe that we get the answer right in every case, but in the vast majority we do.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): One aspect of the hostile environment that sets the UK apart is the overdependence on the use of immigration detention—in particular, the lack of a time limit on detention. This House endorsed a recommendation from a cross-party inquiry seeking an end to indefinite detention and a greater use of community-based alternatives. What consideration is the Minister giving to that recommendation? Will she confirm that the much-delayed further review on detention conditions, being carried out by Stephen Shaw, will be published before the recess?

Caroline Nokes: The use of immigration and removal centres was, in fact, down by 8% last year. The hon. Gentleman will be familiar with the figures that have already been made public—that 63% of detainees are released within 28 days and that in the region of 92% or 93% of detainees are released within four months. Obviously, individuals have the right to apply for
immigration bail at any time, and that happens automatically after four months. We expect to publish the response to the Stephen Shaw report in very short order indeed.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): In my first year as a Member of Parliament, I have been shocked at the level of the hostile environment as it manifests itself in my constituency. Just two weeks ago, the Kamil family in my constituency went on hunger strike outside the Home Office in Glasgow, having been kept in limbo for 18 years, waiting for their asylum application to be assessed. They are Iraqi-Kurdish refugees. How on earth was this able to happen? Eighteen years is worse than a life sentence. Their children were forced into a situation where they were not able to leave the country. Will the Minister commit to investigating this case as part of a wider review?

Caroline Nokes: I am happy to look at this individual case if the hon. Gentleman provides me with the details. I am conscious that we need to do better when it comes to the speed of assessing asylum cases and in ensuring that people receive their decisions in a timely manner.

Visit of President Trump: Policing

11.12 am

Louise Haigh (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab) (Urgent Question): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department—or another Minister, if they care to turn up—to make a statement on policing during the visit of President Trump.

Mr Speaker: Has there been a change of plan or anything?

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): No change of plan; none at all.

Mr Speaker: No change of plan. My office was advised that Minister Hurd would be responding to the urgent question. [Interruption.] He is here now. May I just say to the Minister, while he recovers his breath, that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh) has just put the question? I do not think that the Minister requires it to be repeated; I think that he knows the substance of the matter. I trust that the hon. Lady is content that she has put the question, and we look forward to the initial reply of the Minister.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): Let me first apologise to the hon. Lady for not being in the Chamber when she put the question. I also apologise to you, Mr Speaker, and to the House.

The visit to the UK of any President of the United States of America is, of course, a significant and historic event. I reassure the House that the police have developed robust plans to ensure the safety and security of the visit. The three main forces involved are the Metropolitan Police Service, Thames Valley police and Essex police. Nearly all forces in England and Wales are providing officers and resources to assist with policing plans. This is happening under existing mutual aid arrangements and is being co-ordinated by the National Police Co-ordination Centre.

It is a long-standing tradition in this country that people are free to gather together and demonstrate their views. The police are aware of a number of protests planned across the country and will be working to manage them. The Metropolitan Police Service anticipates protests in London, including two large-scale protests—tomorrow and on Saturday. Proportionate policing plans are in place to support these. This is a significant policing operation and comes, as the House knows, at a time when police resources are also focused on investigating the incidents in Salisbury, protecting us against terrorist attacks and delivering on their own local policing plans. We will consider any request for special grant funding in line with our normal processes.

Let me conclude by stating for the record something I am sure that the whole House feels, which is our appreciation for the incredible hard work that our police officers and their partners are doing to facilitate this visit successfully, coming on top of the work they do every day in every community to protect the public.

Louise Haigh: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question.
Last weekend saw areas as disparate as the west midlands and Dorset receiving the highest ever numbers of 999 calls. This weekend, police forces are preparing for one of the biggest mobilisations in their history. Every force in the country is sending officers to protect the President and to safeguard the democratic right to protest, which I hope will be fully respected by the Metropolitan police tomorrow. West Yorkshire police, for example, are sending 296 officers while themselves contending with an English Defence League march in their own force area.

Initially, requests were made for 300 police support units, each comprising an inspector, three sergeants and 18 police constables, but this request had to be negotiated down to 130 because forces simply could not provide 300. Is the Minister assured that the Trump visit will be adequately policed given the significant reduction in the numbers originally asked for? Does he believe that policing needs elsewhere in the country will be met? Is he satisfied that our policing system, having lost over 21,000 officers, is resilient enough to cope with the additional demand this weekend?

The Government have provided a commitment that Police Scotland will receive £5 million to cover the costs of President Trump’s golfing trip, but English and Welsh forces have been told to apply for a special grant, with no guarantee that the additional costs required will be fully met. Will the Minister commit today to fully reimbursing the costs of the visit? What is his estimation of the total cost for all forces?

Rest days for our police officers are now being cancelled at a phenomenal rate, and the number of officers on long-term sick leave is rocketing. It is simply dangerous to keep asking our officers to do more and more without giving them the time they need to recuperate. What measures will the Minister take to assist forces in allowing officers to take back the cancelled rest days that they are experiencing this weekend? This visit will have a huge knock-on effect well into the summer.

It has emerged overnight that officers being accommodated in Essex are sleeping on cots in squash courts, with 100 female officers with four toilets between them likely to be sleeping on mats tonight, and 300 male officers with five toilets between them, no access to power, and no hot running water. In the run-up to these deployments, it was not clear whether these officers were experiencing this weekend? This visit will have a huge impact on their living conditions.

Has the Minister committed to providing any special grant? We increased the size of that pot significantly this year—a funding settlement to increase public investment in our police support. That is why we took action in the last funding settlement to increase public investment in our police support unit ticket? Rest days for our police officers are now being cancelled at a phenomenal rate, and the number of officers on long-term sick leave is rocketing. It is simply dangerous to keep asking our officers to do more and more without giving them the time they need to recuperate. What measures will the Minister take to assist forces in allowing officers to take back the cancelled rest days that they are experiencing this weekend? This visit will have a huge knock-on effect well into the summer.

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Tonight, the Minister and I will both be presenting at the national police bravery awards. Surely he cannot agree that this is any way to treat our overstretched officers. The time for warm words is over. The Government must now provide the police with the support they desperately need.

Mr Hurd: I thank the hon. Lady for those questions. I will give her some assurances on some of the specifics she raised.

The hon. Lady asked whether the right to peaceful protest will be respected, particularly in London. I can assure her of that, having spoken to the gold commander today specifically on that point. The police have been working closely with the protesters and they resent any suggestion to the contrary in this regard. The right to protest is fundamental for us and it needs to be respected.

The hon. Lady raised concerns about accommodation for officers in Essex. She is right to do so. Those concerns have been raised directly with Essex police and are being managed.

The hon. Lady asked whether there were sufficient police resources to support the security of the visit in an effective way. Again, I have had the assurance from the gold commander in charge of this operation that that is the case. They are extremely comfortable about the situation. In fact, the number of police officers required for this operation has fallen significantly in the past two weeks.

The hon. Lady asked about how exceptional costs will be met. We have the special grant, which we increased in the 2018-19 settlement and is designed specifically to help meet exceptional costs. I signalled in my response to her question that that pot of grant money is open for business in relation to this very significant policing event.

The hon. Lady’s fundamental point was around whether the police have the resources they need under very stretched circumstances. We have had this debate many times, and she knows that I have been extremely candid in my view, shared by the Home Secretary, that the police are very stretched, and they deserve additional support. That is why we took action in the last funding settlement to increase public investment in our police system by £460 million this year—a funding settlement that her party opposed.

Dame Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): I commend the work of our police and the way in which they keep us safe, no matter what demands are placed on their time. I particularly commend my police force, the Thames Valley police force, which has a lot of extra duties in guarding not only politicians and visiting politicians but also our royal family. It does that without complaint and in an exceedingly good fashion. I am pleased to hear that a special grant will be available to supplement the funding to the Thames Valley police, but can the Minister tell me whether that will be forthcoming immediately? Will there be any contribution at all from the US Government to the high cost of this presidential visit?

Mr Hurd: I join my right hon. Friend in placing on record our admiration of and thanks to Thames Valley police force for the work it is doing in the context of this visit and the wider work it does to support and protect her constituents. This is an opportunity to again place on record our cross-party admiration of and support for the police and the work they are doing under, admittedly and frankly, very stretching circumstances at this moment in time. She asked about the exceptional grant. We increased the size of that pot significantly this year to support police forces in this type of situation, and as I said, that pot is open for business.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): Let me first echo the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford) at Prime Minister’s questions yesterday. Rather than the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Scotland rolling out the red carpet, they should be focusing on challenging President Trump on his abysmal record on human rights, women and minorities.
The Scottish Government’s Cabinet Secretary for Justice has been making commendable efforts since his appointment to prepare for this business, but getting any co-operation from the UK Government has been like pulling teeth. Why did the Justice Minister have to reach out to receive an assurance that, with Trump being a guest of the UK Government, the UK Government will be covering the policing bill for his time in Scotland? Why was that assurance not given from the outset? Similarly, why has the Justice Minister been required to request what one would expect to be basic information from the UK Government, such as where President Trump is expected to be and when? Does the Minister believe that effective planning can take place without that information being known in advance?

Mr Hurd: I have not been privy to those conversations, but it is clear that the funding issue has been settled, and I understand that the policing plans for the Scottish leg of the President’s visit are in good order.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It seems to me that there are two fundamentally different parts of the security costs: there are the security costs for the protection of the President in various locations, and there are the costs of policing the demonstrations in London. London has lots of big demonstrations every year. Does the Policing Minister have any estimate of the cost for the Metropolitan police of policing demonstrations throughout the year? What is his working assumption about the cost of policing these two days of demonstrations for the President’s visit?

Mr Hurd: My hon. Friend is entirely right to distinguish between the effective policing of the President’s itinerary and the policing of protests in London and other parts of the country. The police expect more than 100 protests across the country, and there are separate policing plans within one strategy. He is also right to point out that the policing of major events in London is regular business for the Metropolitan police, with significant costs attached, which we support through Home Office grants and for the Metropolitan police, with significant costs attached, which we support through Home Office grants and the protection of the President in various locations, and there are the costs of policing the demonstrations in London. London has lots of big demonstrations every year. Does the Policing Minister have any estimate of the cost for the Metropolitan police of policing demonstrations throughout the year? What is his working assumption about the cost of policing these two days of demonstrations for the President’s visit?

Mr Hurd: I am not going to get into a debate about whether my hon. Friend looks American, but he makes a fundamental point: any visit by any President of the United States of America is a significant and historic event for this country. The reality, although I detect some discomfort about this among Opposition Members, is that President Trump is the democratically elected leader of our most important ally and this relationship has enormous consequences for the security and prosperity of all our constituents. Of course we should welcome him. We should also be absolutely professional, as everyone would expect, in making sure that the security arrangements for such an important visit are robust and fit for purpose, and I am satisfied that they are.

Mr Hurd: First, I congratulate South Yorkshire police force on the fantastic progress it is making, and it is important that we should recognise that. I am very aware that this is a very significant policing operation, which has significant short-term costs but also has implications for the force management of local forces for some time. We do have a mechanism to help with the
short-term costs. As I said to the Chairman of the Select Committee, we are doing serious work on the funding requirements for local police forces, and we will bring that back to the House for debate in late November or December.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): I welcome the earlier announcement by the UK Government that they will support the policing of this visit in Scotland to the tune of £5 million. Will the Policing Minister confirm that, despite what the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) said, there has been full co-operation with Police Scotland in preparing for the visit to ensure the safety of those on the visit, the protesters and, importantly, the policemen and women who will be at the forefront of the operation in Scotland?

**Mr Hurd**: I certainly am satisfied of that. I suspect that is the usual scaremongering from the SNP, because as far as I understand it, the funding is settled and the police plan is robust.

**Mr Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover) (Lab): What on earth are the Government playing at by inviting a fascist like Trump to come to Britain and cause all the mayhem that we have heard about from Labour Members, requiring police from every part of the British Isles? Do the Government, and in particular the Prime Minister, want to hold his hand again? Is that what it is all about? They are making a rod for their own back.

**Mr Hurd**: The hon. Gentleman, as always, is entitled to his own robust views, but the fact of the matter is that President Trump is the democratically elected leader of the United States of America, which is historically, and currently, our most important ally. It is a hugely important relationship for the security and prosperity of the hon. Gentleman’s constituents and those of all Members of the House. We should make the President welcome.

**Mr David Lammy** (Tottenham) (Lab): “Together against Trump” has organised an important protest against this most divisive global figure for tomorrow afternoon. It is usual for those who gather at Portland Place to be able to hear speeches. Why on this occasion has the Metropolitan Police said, unusually, that it will not allow a stand, which would enable those gathered to hear people speak before they begin their march?

**Mr Hurd**: I have spoken to the gold commander of this operation, and she is adamant that the police have worked closely with the organisers of the protest. The police are determined to respect people’s fundamental right in this country to peaceful protest, but they also have the right to impose some conditions on protests in the interests of public safety. I am not aware of the specific details to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but I am happy to ask and furnish him with a response.

**Christine Jardine** (Edinburgh West) (LD): As one of many Members of the House who love America, may I ask the Minister why so much money—£5 million in Scotland—is being spent to protect the President at a time when we are so badly stretched and when, in effect, the President is going to play golf on his own golf course?

Mr Hurd: It is a lot of money and resources are tight, but the President of the United States is here on an official visit. It is our responsibility to ensure that appropriate security arrangements are in place, and that is what we are doing.

**Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I do not have the numbers for Durham, but I know that 100 officers have been requested from Northumbria police at a time when a great many events are taking place in the region, not least the excellent Durham miners’ gala in my constituency. It is important that the police have enough resources to keep people in the region safe as well. Will the Minister take that on board, and will he speak to his colleagues so that we know what the total cost of this visit will be, including the cost of policing, and how it will be met? I am sure that, like me, a lot of people will be asking: is it worth it?

**Mr Hurd**: I understand the hon. Lady’s point about police resources in Durham. Arrangements for these events have historically relied on good mutual arrangements, and they are the subject of frank conversations between those co-ordinating events in gold command and the co-ordination centre, and local police chiefs who obviously have to make decisions based on local policing needs at that time. On the basis of what I have heard, I am satisfied that those conversations have taken place in the right way, and that the outcomes are satisfactory for all concerned. We will not know the total cost of the visit until it has concluded, but it will run into millions, and of course it will be disclosed.

**Holly Lynch** (Halifax) (Lab): The photos of the accommodation in Essex that awaits officers who have been drafted to the capital are shameful. I have no doubt that in an emergency situation our brave officers would not think twice about using such accommodation, but this is not an emergency and planning for this visit has taken place over three months. The Minister said that the situation is being managed, but can he assure officers that they will not be sleeping on mats in sports halls this evening?

**Mr Hurd**: That is certainly not my wish. The comments I have seen from the National Police Chiefs Council make it quite clear that it considers the situation to be unacceptable, and Essex police are working on a better solution.

**Stephen Doughty** (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Just to be clear, I love America and Americans. Indeed, my grandfather was a GI in the second world war. This President is racist, divisive and sexist, and if we were not rolling out the red carpet for him in so many locations, we would not have these costs and pressures on the police. I have a very serious question about far right activity. The President has shared content from a vile fascist organisation whose leaders have now been jailed. What assessment has the Minister made of the potential for far right groups to use the visit as a rallying opportunity?

**Mr Hurd**: The police have made an assessment of all the protests. As I have said, they estimate that there will be more than 100 protests across the country. Their biggest concern, with regard to what they call “spiky
activity,” is about two protests in London on Saturday by groups that have different views on the subject. They are managing the risks in the professional way that we would all expect, including by imposing some conditions on the route of the marches in order to keep the protesters separate and reduce the risk of confrontation.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Like the hon. Member for Mid Worcestershire (Nigel Huddleston), I have a wife who is a US citizen. She does not welcome the UK Government rolling out the red carpet for Trump. We have already heard that Police Scotland and the Scottish Government cannot plan properly for Trump’s visit to Scotland because the UK Government will not co-operate or even tell us which golf course he will visit. Is that secrecy the result of wilful arrogance on the part of the UK Government, or conditions imposed by Trump to try to stifle demonstrations?

Mr Hurd: The Scottish National party keeps poking away at this. I have seen absolutely no evidence to suggest that there is any problem with the policing plan for Scotland, which is sorted. I cannot help what individual Members of Parliament or their wives think about President Trump, but he is the democratically elected leader of our most important ally. It is our responsibility to ensure that this historic visit is policed in the most professional way.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): People are protesting against President Trump’s visit because they want to demonstrate their opposition to his bigotry and racism—his comparing migrants to poisonous snakes, and Mexicans to murderers and rapists, and state-sanctioned child abuse—and that is their right. For the Metropolitan police to decide not to allow a platform for speakers at the protest in central London tomorrow is an absolute disgrace. The Minister must intervene immediately to put that right. Failure to do so will leave a permanent stain on our democratic right to freedom of speech.

Mr Hurd: I will defend to the hilt the right to peaceful protest, which is absolutely fundamental. I completely understand the strength of opinion on President Trump’s visit. The police have to base their operational decisions on their assessment of risk. Having spoken to the gold commander, I know that she is extremely keen to ensure that the police respect the right to peaceful protest, but I have undertaken to speak to her again in the light of the question from the right hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy).

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): This year I am taking part in the police service parliamentary scheme, which I recommend to all hon. Members. I recently visited the counter-terrorism unit, and I have spent a lot of time with Avon and Somerset police. Avon and Somerset police last year produced a report called “The Tipping Point”, which was about analysing demand using a very high-tech computer system. I do not think the Minister has seen that system, so I encourage him to visit so that he really understands the demand and the high-tech solutions that that police force has to offer.

Mr Hurd: I congratulate the hon. Lady on taking part in the police service parliamentary scheme, which is a fantastic thing to do—I know that other Members have benefited hugely from it. I have to correct her on one point, because I have visited Avon and Somerset police and sat down with the officers managing their data system, which I would describe as best in class. It helps them to manage demand more effectively, which is a fundamental challenge for every police force across the country. They are showing the way, using existing data and the latest technology in a smart way to make an enormous difference in how precious police officer time is managed. I congratulate them on their leadership.

Paul Blomfield (Sheffield Central) (Lab): While recognising the real importance of our relationship with the United States and the deep bonds that we have with the American people, should we not be the fact that so many people across the country are preparing to take a stand against this President, his views and his policies? On the question of policing, I have met South Yorkshire police leadership twice over the last fortnight and on both occasions, they have expressed concern about the impact of deploying 160 officers when their resources have been reduced by so much. Is not the real problem that this Government and their immediate predecessor have brought down policing numbers to virtually unsustainable levels?

Mr Hurd: I share the hon. Gentleman’s passion for protecting the right to peaceful protest. It is fundamental to our democracy, so there is nothing between us on that, nor is there anything between us on the importance that we attach to our relationship with the United States of America. On his point about police funding, I come back to what I said before: as a country, under this Government we are spending £1 billion more this year on our police system than we were three years ago. There is £460 million more this year through the police funding settlement that he and other Labour MPs voted against.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): I understand that Greater Manchester police have been asked to contribute 250 officers to policing President Trump’s visit around the country, but as the Minister noted, demonstrations will take place in other parts of the country, including in Manchester tomorrow evening. I know because I intend to attend that protest. Will he assure me that Greater Manchester police will be able to prioritise meeting our local policing needs and not have other officers pulled away to help elsewhere, leaving us exposed at our own demonstration?

Mr Hurd: Let me say two things in reply. First, I place on record my thanks to Greater Manchester officers and officers from South Yorkshire and other parts of the country who have stepped up to help police this very significant occasion. They are very hard-worked and overstretched at the moment anyway, so I am extremely grateful to them for doing it. Secondly, Ian Hopkins, the chief constable of Greater Manchester police, will have done his job of assessing any requests for support and balancing them with what he needs to keep the people of Greater Manchester safe. His job is to strike the right balance. I also note that the demand on officers from other forces has reduced significantly over the last two weeks as the plans have become clear.
Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Will the Minister confirm that West Yorkshire police are providing nearly 300 officers, even though there is a planned English Defence League demo in our region? Further to the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green), will he therefore absolutely guarantee the safety of local people during that demo, when so many of our officers will be deployed elsewhere?

Mr Hurd: I will give the hon. Lady a similar answer to the one before. Almost every police force is contributing officers, but the numbers have significantly reduced in the last two weeks, so I do not know whether the 300 number that she cites is accurate. However, on the police’s decisions about how resources are allocated to police this significant occasion, I come back to the point that these are local operating decisions that the local chief and the local police and crime commissioner need to take in co-ordination with the National Police Co-ordination Centre to make sure that they are not taking unnecessary risks in their home base.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): Of course we need to keep President Trump safe, but equally, my constituents need to be safe, and Humberside police are overstretched at the moment. We have higher than ever levels of antisocial behaviour on Princes Avenue, Newland Avenue and the North Hull estate, including from motorbike yobs. My constituents will be furious to know that inspectors, sergeants and police constables are going down to keep President Trump safe. Does this not show that the hollowing out of police numbers across this country has repercussions for local communities?

Mr Hurd: I think that people understand and share the hon. Lady’s hope—people expect us to do a professional job on the security around such an historic and significant visit. On local police resources, again I have said that we are putting more money into local policing. We continue to keep that under review. We have made it quite clear that funding for police is a priority for us, and I hope she would recognise that additional money has gone into Humberside police through a police funding settlement that she voted against.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): May I echo what my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) said? The Humberside police force has been cut to the bone over the years. It was asked for three police support units but could cobble together only two, and even that was a result of the cancellation of officers’ annual leave. I should like to know whether an assessment has been made of the impact of the cancelled annual leave on those officers’ mental health, and on their diligence while they are on duty.

Mr Hurd: I fully recognise that our police forces are stretched, and I have done so from this Dispatch Box. That is why we have given them additional resources. As for the hon. Lady’s point about distress and the impact on wellbeing, we have committed taxpayers’ money to the development of a national welfare programme for police officers, because we recognise that the issue is hugely important. That is all part of our police funding settlement, which has put an additional £460 million into the police system, including additional money for Humberside, but which the hon. Lady and others voted against.

Jeff Smith (Manchester, Withington) (Lab): The Greater Manchester force has lost 2,000 officers since 2010, and it is clear from my case load that it is already struggling to cope with the workload. Now 250 of the remaining officers are being called in to police the Trump visit. Does the Minister accept that if the Government are going to rely on calling in officers from local forces, they should fully reinstate the funding for Greater Manchester police and other local forces so that they have enough officers to cope?

Mr Hurd: Let me make two points in answer to that question. First, the structure of mutual aid to police significant events is well established. It is a highly sensible, smart system enabling us to make the best possible use of the resources that we have. It has been a fact of life under successive Governments for a long time, and there is nothing new in it at all. As for the hon. Gentleman’s general point about police resources, I have already responded to it. The Government are putting more money into local policing, including in Greater Manchester, and we keep the position under review. That, too, is all part of the police funding settlement, which put more money into policing and which the hon. Gentleman voted against.
Business of the House

11.46 am

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): Will the Leader of the House please give us the forthcoming business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):
The business for next week will be as follows:

Monday 16 July—Remaining stages of the Taxation (Cross-Border Trade) Bill, followed by a motion to approve Standing Orders relating to the European Statutory Instruments Committee.
Tuesday 17 July—Remaining stages of the Trade Bill, followed by a motion to approve a Ways and Means resolution on the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill.

Wednesday 18 July—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Domestic Gas and Electricity (Tariﬀ Cap) Bill, followed by a general debate on the future relationship between the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Thursday 19 July—Debate on a motion on the independent complaints and grievance policy, followed by a general debate on the tobacco control plan.
Friday 20 July—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 23 July will include the following:

Monday 23 July—A general debate, subject to be announced.
Tuesday 24 July—A general debate on matters to be considered before the forthcoming adjournment.

I am sure that the whole House will have enjoyed marking the 100th birthday of our fantastic Royal Air Force. The celebrations culminated in a spectacular flypast, and gave us a good opportunity to thank the RAF for its service. We also had the superb, heartwarming news this week that the 12 Thai boys and their football coach had all been successfully rescued by a Thai-led international team, including British expert divers. We wish them all a full and speedy recovery.

Finally, it was not to be, but we are all incredibly proud of the efforts of our England football team and the wonderful Gareth Southgate in the World cup. That bodes very well for a bright future for the team.

Valerie Vaz: I am not quite sure whether I should thank the Leader of the House for the future business, because it is an absolute outrage that an Opposition day that was allocated for Wednesday has been taken away. Will the Leader of the House please explain why we have lost our Opposition day? This is an outrage. Will the Leader of the House make a statement either later today or on Monday explaining why there was this shambles about the White Paper? It has taken the Government two years—[Interruption.] Would you like me to sit down, Mr Speaker? You look poised to say something.

Mr Speaker: As is not uncommon, I was just conferring with the chief procedural adviser, the Clerk of the House, but I am now all ears. I am always listening to the hon. Lady, and this morning is no exception; please continue.

Valerie Vaz: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I wish the Government were all ears, but they are not. It has taken them two years to agree a position, and now it seems that there may be two White Papers: the ex-DExEU Secretary apparently produced a White Paper at Chequers. So we need to know about this; we need to have a proper debate on whether the Government’s White Paper is the settled position. This is typical of the new DExEU Secretary; welcome to his world—authoritarian and cynical.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs said he hoped that the agriculture Bill would be published before the recess. Will it? And when will the migration and fisheries and the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bills be published?

As the rest of the world is moving forward, the Government are moving backwards. There is a remake of “Oceans 8” with women in the lead, but not for the reshuffle: the new positions are all ﬁlled by men, and we need to congratulate, I suppose, the heckler-in-chief the hon. Member for Daventry (Chris Heaton-Harris) who is now a DExEU Minister.

The Leader of the House may want to correct the record. In a BBC “Newsnight” interview on Tuesday she said that as Leader of the House she took the withdrawal Bill through Parliament. I think it is clear that she did not: it was the DExEU team that did that. She also said that “who we should all be pointing our guns on is those negotiators in the EU”.

Will she retract that inflammatory statement, particularly as this is a negotiation, not a battle?

The Leader of the House seems to be picking up the inflammatory statements of the President of the United States. As he lands in the UK, children are still being reunited with their parents. CNN has footage of reunion between a child and her mother after being separated for 55 days and toddlers going to court without a child and her mother after being separated for 55 days and toddlers going to court without the presence of “Oceans 8” with women in the lead, but not for the withdrawal Bill through Parliament. I think it is clear that she did not: it was the DExEU team that did that. She also said that “who we should all be pointing our guns on is those negotiators in the EU”.

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The Leader of the House seems to be picking up the inflammatory statements of the President of the United States. As he lands in the UK, children are still being reunited with their parents. CNN has footage of reunion between a child and her mother after being separated for 55 days and toddlers going to court without representation; we are reminded what a cruel policy this is. The person who instigated that policy will be meeting our sovereign. And let us also remember that that person is not a native American. He is not one of the First Nations; he was an immigrant himself.

As this seems still to be unclear following the urgent question of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Louise Haigh), will the Leader of the House place in the Library the total costs of policing the visit, for all the places, including under the devolved Administrations, that the President is going to for his business interests and leisure?
We know that the President has had private discussions with various Members about our leaving the EU, but there is more work to be done. This is a complicated process; it is not just “yes” or “no” on a ballot paper. According to the House of Commons Library, the UK will leave up to 1,256 international agreements to which the EU is party, and the Financial Times has reported that the UK will need to renegotiate 759 separate EU agreements with 168 countries. The International Trade Committee said that the number of EU trade and trade-related agreements “appears to be a matter of some uncertainty” and warned of trade with 70 nations “falling off a cliff edge” if the Government did not act quickly enough to roll over the EU trade deals. May we have a debate to update the House on what the Government have in place to ensure that the UK’s international agreements continue to apply as we leave the EU?

Further to the urgent question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr Lammy), may we have an urgent debate on an apparent change of Government policy and whether the hostile environment policy has ended? It seems that we only found out after Kieran Trippier’s goal—and I join the Leader of the House in thanking the England team; we were glad to see England team for making us roar again, because football does matter and they certainly exceeded our wildest expectations. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the “do not resuscitate”—DNR—protocols?

The hon. Lady also mentioned by name the Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my hon. Friend Andrea Leadsom: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for providing Opposition days, and we will continue to do that. I am always happy to consider all reasonable requests.

The hon. Lady asked about the Brexit negotiations. These are complex negotiations, as she has just acknowledged. The White Paper will set out the clear way in which we will give effect to the Cabinet agreement at Chequers. The intention is to stick with the red lines that were set out by the Brexit referendum—that we will be leaving the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, that we will no longer be paying our EU subscription, that we will be ending free movement, that we will be leaving the single market, the customs union, the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, and that we will be able to trade freely with the rest of the world. This is a complicated negotiation, and we are determined to achieve success in it. What this proposal will set out to achieve is that we meet our red lines while also addressing those of the European Union. It is fully our intention that the EU will come to the table and start negotiating with the same level of sincere co-operation that we are all signed up to as members.

The hon. Lady mentioned the visit of the President of the United States. Is it not fantastic that we live in a free democracy where we are free to set out our own thoughts? Is it not also great that our Prime Minister is meeting the President in order to set out those areas where we want to collaborate and also those areas where we disagree? We made it very clear at the time that we did not agree with the idea of separating children from their parents, and we were pleased that the President signed an Executive order to put a stop to that. That was very important.

The hon. Lady asked whether we could have a debate on free trade deals. Yes, we can—on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday next week. I hope that she is pleased with that. She also asked whether we could have some Home Office questions answered. We have Home Office questions on Monday. I therefore hope that she is happy with the progress that is being made.

Sir David Amess (Southend West) (Con): I thank the England team for making us roar again, because football does matter and they certainly exceeded our wildest expectations. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the “do not resuscitate”—DNR—protocols? It can often be traumatic when someone is called to a hospital and asked whether they want their loved one to be resuscitated. This is a profound and dark subject, but it is certainly one that Parliament should consider.

Andrea Leadsom: DNR decisions are traumatic and distressing, so my hon. Friend is right to raise them for consideration. Resuscitation guidance is produced...
jointly by the Resuscitation Council, the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing, and it suggests that decisions should be made only after sensitive discussions between healthcare professionals and those close to the patient. However, the Select Committee on Health and Social Care may be interested in considering the topic, so I encourage my hon. Friend to take up how we can improve awareness of and guidance on DNR decisions.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week. As the nation awoke with a collective hangover this morning, we can only wonder what could have been. If only David Cameron had not used a vote on EU membership as a means to unite a divided Conservative party! But well done Gareth Southgate, who has done what this miserable Government could never do: unite England under one true leader.

At last, the long-awaited White Paper is being launched this morning, and it probably represents the last chance for this divided shambles of a Government to take forward their chaotic Brexit. It has been launched in the usual shambolic way, however. I just received word that we received the White Paper at 11.53 am, and I presume that that was the same for the Labour Front-Bench team, too. That is no way to progress such important business in the House and shows great disrespect to Members. I hope that the Leader of the House can give some account of what has happened this morning because she failed to respond to the shadow Leader of the House.

There is some good news for the Leader of the House; she is a reasonable shot at 12:1 to take over from the beleaguered Prime Minister, but she is somewhat behind the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), who comes in at 5:1. I think it is accepted that this Prime Minister is but one more resignation away from a leadership challenge, so I say to the Leader of the House, without cliché, that if the call of history comes, it is who dares that wins.

I think the nation is appalled by the arrangements for the visit of President Trump. This is a man who demonstrates the worst attributes of misogyny. He scapegoats migrants and displays appalling Islamophobia, yet the Government are rolling out the red carpet. Scotland will be protesting his visit based on what his presidency represents, not our friendship with the United States. Perhaps we can have some sort of debate about what he means for relations between this country and the United States.

Finally, Mr Speaker, you may have seen some delightful children with Scottish accents running around the place this week. That is because their parents are Members of Parliament and the Scottish school holidays have started. Surely we can design a recess that takes account of all summer holidays throughout the UK. Please, make this the last year that this happens.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman asks about the White Paper, and I am sure that he will be delighted, as will all hon. Members, that the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union will be making a statement following business questions; there will be the opportunity to ask questions then. In addition, there will be a general debate on the White Paper next week.

Turning to the visit of the US President, I want to make it clear to all colleagues that the objectives of the visit are to recognise and celebrate the unique and close bond between our two countries, to strengthen our bilateral relationship across prosperity, trade, security and defence and to have open, frank discussions on key issues. Opposition Members may like to think that we should simply turn our backs and have nothing to do with the US President, but that means never being able to put our point across. A responsible Government always seek to maintain a close relationship—one where the Prime Minister or the President can pick up the phone at short notice or meet in person to make their case. That was demonstrated emphatically when President Trump strongly supported our response to the Salisbury attack, expelling 60 Russian intelligence officers and encouraging other allies to join our co-ordinated response. The relationship is vital for open and frank engagement.

On childcare, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I, too, have children who have been running around this place. It is not only Scottish MPs who have childcare issues to resolve; parents right across the United Kingdom have to deal with the school holidays. The whole of Parliament cannot possibly go into recess for the entirety of all the school holidays in order to facilitate childcare arrangements. That is not acceptable to the people of this country, who expect to see their elected politicians working pretty much 24/7 to represent their interests. That said, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that I had a very productive meeting with the SNP Chief Whip and I have agreed to try to facilitate arrangements that will suit SNP Members during the October recess, which is a particular problem for them. I look forward to making progress on that.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I note from the exchanges that the White Paper has been made available to those on the Front Benches. I must say that those on the Back Benches have an equal interest and it is a matter of great regret that we have not seen it yet, although I understand the point about the statement that is about to be made. It raises very serious questions. Will my right hon. Friend guarantee that we have a proper dialogue, not merely a listening process, because this matter affects the whole of our democratic self-government into the future? Will she also take account of the fact that the European Scrutiny Committee yesterday issued a summons to Mr Oliver Robbins to appear before it on 24 July at an appropriate time? I thought it would be useful to make that clear to the House.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend has been truly assiduous in his scrutiny of all things to do with the UK’s relationship with the EU over many years. The House owes him a debt of gratitude for his careful consideration of these issues. As he would expect, the House will have the opportunity to debate and listen carefully to views right across the House, as happened with the EU withdrawal Bill, on which we had 290 hours of debate and 1,400 amendments were tabled and considered. There will be a general debate on the White Paper next week and further debates and opportunities to discuss the Government’s proposals in the White Paper, including in the statement to follow.

Ian Mearns (Gateshead) (Lab): I have to admit to being slightly puzzled, bemused, perplexed and mystified by the Leader of the House’s business statement this
morning, because it seems that the business on the 19th and the 24th is business that was determined by the Backbench Business Committee but is no longer under the aegis of the Committee; it looks like the Government have taken back those dates and put on general debates, but on the topics determined by the Committee. I feel a bit perplexed about that. It means that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton North (Alex Cunningham) will not be able to lead off in the debate on the tobacco control plan and that the hon. Member for Harrow East (Bob Blackman) will not be able to lead off in the debate on matters to be raised before the forthcoming Adjournment, if the Government take back control. I do not know why they have done that.

Also, there is an anomaly with the timing of business in this place. When we return on 4 September, the business of the Chamber will begin on Monday hours, at 2.30 pm, but business in Westminster Hall, where there is scheduled to be a Backbench Business Committee debate, will begin on Tuesday hours, at 9.30 am. That makes life extremely difficult for Members travelling from further afield. I am writing to the Chairman of Ways and Means to see whether we can alter the time in Westminster Hall to reflect Monday hours, not Tuesday hours, so that business can start at the same time across the House.

Andrea Leadsom: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman’s point about Westminster Hall—it does sound quite difficult to manage—and would be happy to help him if I can. On the debates on tobacco and the pre-recess Adjournment, I think he can celebrate the fact that it means he will have extra Back-Bench business days while also having debates that the Committee was keen to have.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I went along to the Vote Office at the same time as the hon. Member for Caerphilly (Wayne David), and there was no EU White Paper there. It is strange that the press had it at 9 o’clock in the morning. That is not how this place should be run. Referring to “the White Paper” is a bit confusing, however, because we now know there are two White Papers. The first was developed by Ministers and officials and sent to all Departments for comment, and was in line with the Government’s policy at the time, which united 98% of Conservative MPs. We now know there is a second White Paper, developed by officials and Spads in No. 10 and which none of the Ministers saw. If we are to have a general debate next week, it would be really useful if both White Papers were presented. Maybe the House could then divide on which one it prefers.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is always full of great ideas for how to proceed. I suggest that he takes this up with the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union in the statement to follow.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Here is the problem: the Government do not have a majority, there is a majority against every single option that has thus far been presented on Brexit and trying simply to unite the Conservative party will, in the end, fail. If the Government are to act in the national interest, rather than in just the party interest, they will have to stop all this jiggery-pokery about trying to hide things from the rest of the House by presenting the White Paper only when the Minister sits down after talking about it. All of that has to stop. The House has to act in the national interest, and the Government have to stop all the nonsense and start bringing all of us on board, otherwise they will be relying on emergency powers to take us through the next year.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong on all counts. He will be aware that the Cabinet met last Friday. Today is Thursday, a few days later, and the Government are coming forward with that White Paper to set it out to the entire House, with a debate next week. The hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz) has already complained about the fact we have facilitated a debate.

My right hon. Friend the new Brexit Secretary is about to come to the House to make a statement to enable all hon. Members to quiz him. What the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and all hon. Members need to understand is that this is a complicated negotiation and that what the Prime Minister is seeking to do is to ensure that we can stick to the red lines we have agreed while, at the same time, sticking to the red lines that the EU has set out. That makes it extraordinarily complicated but also extraordinarily clever, and it is worthy of very careful discussion and debate.

Mr Speaker: Order. It is obvious that there is very considerable unhappiness in the House, and I have heard what the Leader of the House has said. There are conventions on these matters, not all of which will commend themselves to the House. It is not by any means unknown or unprecedented for copies of a document to be issued after a Minister sits down. However, I hope that the Leader of the House might want to reflect on the extent of unhappiness at the idea that the document might not be available to colleagues at the point at which they have the opportunity to question the Secretary of State about it—I put it no more strongly than that. There are conventions, and I am not saying that what the Government are doing is unprecedented.

Andrea Leadsom: Good.

Mr Speaker: The right hon. Lady can think it is good or not think it is good—it is entirely her choice. I do not mind. I am simply stating the factual position, but I think it is important to be sensitive to the fact that there is very considerable upset at the idea that people will not have seen a document about which there is to be a statement and upon which the Secretary of State has come to be questioned. People observing our proceedings from elsewhere might think that is a slightly curious state of affairs.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): I was going to make my normal plea for us to leave the building at the end of this month and lock it down for three months so we can get on with repairing it, but I am struck by what has been said, particularly by you, Mr Speaker. I am a friend of the Government and, frankly, I think it is pretty bad that journalists were given this document at 9 am when we Back Benchers had no chance to read it. If I am lucky enough, I will ask a question on the statement. You will not want me beetling out of the Chamber to try to read the document. How can I possibly understand it? Of course
I could do what I normally do and rubbish it before I have even read it but, as the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) said, we are supposed to be a grown-up Parliament. It would have been possible for the Government to have taken us into their confidence and to have allowed us to start reading the document half an hour ago, at least.

Mr Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has spoken, as he always does, with great eloquence. If I may say so, the Leader of the House will take what view she wants of what he says, but he has said it with very considerable style. I think there will be a feeling about the matter, but let us hear what the Leader of the House has to say.

Andrea Leadsom: As ever, my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) is absolutely charming and puts it very well. I am delighted to speak for my right hon. Friend the new Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union on this subject. I hear the concern of the House, but the House will also have heard that this is not without precedent. As I put it to the hon. Member for Rhondda, these are difficult times and these are complicated negotiations. It was only last week that the Cabinet agreed a way forward, and I think all hon. Members should accept that the Government are coming to the House as soon as possible to set out what he says, but he has said it with very considerable style. I think there will be a feeling about the matter, but let us hear what the Leader of the House has to say.

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Grahame Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Leader of the House will recognise the vital work by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency to keep the public and road users safe, but she might not be aware that the DVSA has been in dispute with its staff for the past three years. Before the recess, can we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport and a commitment to intervene as a matter of urgency so we can engage meaningfully with management and the Public and Commercial Services Union to end this expensive, damaging and demoralising dispute?

Andrea Leadsom: I am not aware of that particular dispute, but the hon. Gentleman might be aware that there are Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions next week. Perhaps he could take it up with Ministers who can look into it for him.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): I join my right hon. Friend in congratulating the Royal Air Force on its 100th anniversary. In particular, I congratulate the Tactical Supply Wing in my constituency of Stafford. I also declare an interest in that my grandfather was a member of the Royal Air Force when it was founded. He is the reason I am in this country and a proud Briton; he was born in Canada and came over.

Can we have a debate on the emergency service within the national health service? Ten years ago, the Royal Stoke University Hospital was due to be made smaller, and in fact was made smaller, and now there is a recognition that additional beds are needed. A few years ago, my constituents also realised that Stafford Hospital needed its A&E, even when experts said it did not. It is clear that we need all the A&E departments we have across the country and that there should be a moratorium on any further closures. Can we have a debate on that? The common sense of ordinary people often sees better than experts.

Andrea Leadsom: First, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend’s amazing support for his hospital in Staffordshire. All hon. Members will recognise that he has worked tirelessly to try to improve the position for all his constituents who use that hospital. Of course, he is absolutely right that any decisions about hospital provision are required to be discussed and consulted on locally, including with local health providers, which are better placed to know what is needed in their area. I am sure he will be delighted to hear of the increased funding—3.4% in real terms each year, on average—that will be given to the NHS in this its 70th year. I remind him that we have Health and Social Care questions on 24 July, when he might like to raise the matter directly with Ministers.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Wednesday 18 July will be the centenary of the birth of the great Nelson Mandela. Will the Leader of the House allow time on 18 July for us to debate the life of Nelson Mandela and the role of the anti-apartheid movement in the United Kingdom? Will she commend the Nelson Mandela Scottish Memorial Foundation, which is fundraising for a statue of Nelson Mandela to be erected in the great city of Glasgow?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. There is an enormous recognition right across the world of the extraordinary work of Nelson Mandela in the truth and reconciliation process that took place in South Africa when he became its President. It was quite extraordinary and I do not think we have seen anything like it anywhere else in the world. It is always a great pleasure to see the statue of Mandela in our own Parliament Square, and I congratulate and wish the best of luck to the hon. Gentleman’s Scottish organisation that is seeking to set up a memorial in Scotland.

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): About a year ago, I held an Adjournment debate in this Chamber about young Harry Whitlam, who was killed by a drunk-driver of a tractor. This man was three and a half times over the limit and he crushed Harry, in a totally avoidable accident—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but it is not often that has been requested.

Alec Shelbrooke: It is not often that has been requested of me.

Harry was 11 when he was killed by the tractor. As the accident took place on private land on a farm, the driver could only be charged under health and safety legislation and he got an 18-month sentence—for a totally avoidable accident. In my earlier debate, I asked for the law to be looked into so that we could get parity of esteem, whereby accidents on private land should have the same consequences in law as accidents on public land. The Under-Secretary of State for Transport,
Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise the issue of littering. Whether we are talking about fly-tipping or the mess left by people who are camping illegally, more needs to be done. This is certainly one of the top five or six issues that people raise when they are asked what the problems are in their communities. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is taking this very seriously, having introduced the first English national litter strategy. He is right to raise this and he may well want to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss it further with Ministers.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): The cross-party Youth Violence Violence Commission is publishing its interim report next Wednesday. Will the Leader of the House commit to reading its recommendations and help me to secure the required debates in Parliament with all the relevant Departments on this extremely important issue?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady frequently raises in this place the issue of serious violence, and she is right to do so. I commend her for her work in this area. I was pleased to be able to give a debate in Government time on the serious violence strategy, and she will be aware that on a number of occasions Ministers have come to this place to discuss what more can be done. We also have the Offensive Weapons Bill coming forward, which will try to make it much harder for young people to access serious weapons. I absolutely accept her invitation to read the report on youth violence carefully and to work with her to see what more can be done in this area.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I led the most recent delegation to the Kurdish region of Iraq a few weeks ago. We visited the Iraqi Parliament, and we were thrilled and delighted that the Kurdish Parliament is forming its first all-party group on the UK. May we have a debate on how we continue to work on our fantastic bilateral relations with the Iraqi Kurds and how we can help them to strengthen their institutions, Parliament and fledgling democracy?

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend, as chairman of the all-party group on the Kurdish region in Iraq, is right to be delighted that Kurdistan will have an all-party group on the UK. That kind of bilateral development of a relationship is incredibly important, and he might like to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that all hon. Members can talk about their experiences in supporting the Kurdish region.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister for Health has assured me that he is working hard to appoint a contractor to complete the new Liverpool University Hospital, whose construction has remained at a standstill since the collapse of Carillion more than six months ago. It is very unclear whether there is any real sense of urgency and whether the Treasury is co-operating with the Department of Health and Social Care. May we have a statement on this, as the people of Liverpool need to know what is going on and, above all, they need their new hospital?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is right to highlight the importance of this hospital to her constituents. If Carillion was involved, I can understand that she may...
[Andrea Leadsom]

have specific concerns. We have Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy questions and Health and Social Care questions on the last day before the recess, which provides two opportunities for her to raise those specific points about her local hospital.

Douglas Ross (Moray) (Con): The Leader of the House highlighted the spectacular RAF display we saw in London this week. The military theme continues on Sunday with a documentary entitled “Dunkirk: The Forgotten Heroes” being shown on Channel 4. It features one of my constituents, Donald Smith from Forres, whom I have had the pleasure of meeting in my time as MP for Moray. May we have a debate about the contribution the military make to a country and the contribution that so many heroes such as Donald Smith have made, to ensure that they are truly never forgotten?

Andrea Leadsom: It was fantastic to see the crowds of people who turned out to cheer the RAF fly-past. There can be no better reassurance of our determination to remember the bravery and dedication of our current and former service personnel. I pay tribute to Donald Smith, who is one of those to whom we owe an extraordinary debt. We do, of course, observe Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Day as an important gesture every year to show our gratitude to all those who protected our country.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Stoke’s The Sentinel newspaper is this afternoon presenting a petition to the Prime Minister at No. 10 as part of its NHS SOS campaign. Following on from the question from the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), may we have a debate in Government time on the need for proper investment in our NHS and for a truly integrated health economy?

Andrea Leadsom: I am sure that the hon. Lady will welcome the enormous increase in health funding that the Government have agreed, which will be worth 3.4% in real terms each year from 2019-20 to 2023-24. She asks for a debate on health; we have had several health debates and plenty of opportunities for discussion, and there will be many further chances to debate health issues, not least at Health and Social Care questions on the last day before the recess. All Members might like to know the excellent statistics coming from our NHS. For example, Sir Simon Stevens, the chief executive of the NHS England said:

“What’s been achieved in England over the past three years?... Highest cancer survival rates ever—latest survival figures show an estimated 7000+ more people surviving cancer after successful NHS cancer treatment compared to three years prior.”

This is about not only cancer treatment but the thousands more operations being carried out and millions more people being seen. The NHS is in very good hands with this Government.

Andrew Bowie (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (Con): This past Saturday, it was a genuine pleasure to welcome the mayor of Achères in northern France to Stonehaven in my constituency, where a twinning agreement between the two towns was signed. Will the Leader of the House agree to hold a debate in Government time on the importance of twinning arrangements and the benefits that they can bring? As we are leaving the EU, such arrangements demonstrate that we are not leaving Europe and that the bonds of friendship and co-operation with our neighbours across the channel will continue and endure.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The UK Government recognise the value of effective partnerships between strong and active communities right across Europe and throughout the wider world. That is why at the UK-France summit in January the Prime Minister was proud to announce our intention to support a new generation of links by bringing together mayors, leaders of city regions and others as they address today’s challenges. Jointly with the French Government, we have set an objective of having 10 new twinnings every year until 2022. I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising in this place the success of his local twinning ceremony.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): On 3 May—two months ago—the Leader of the House told me that a White Paper on the immigration Bill would be forthcoming “in the coming months”. That was two months ago and recess is hurtling towards us. Will she please enlighten me on whether the immigration Bill is going to see the light of day before the recess, after the recess, before the conference recess, or even before Christmas? Will it even be here before we leave the European Union next March?

Andrea Leadsom: As I have said frequently in this place, we will bring forward all the Brexit legislation, as we need to, in good time before we leave the European Union, and that includes publishing the White Paper. To be clear, this is a complicated negotiation. Normally in a parliamentary Session, we have the issues of getting the Government’s legislation through with Parliament scrutinising it. What is unique about this period is that a careful negotiation is also going on with our EU friends and partners, so we have to look carefully at policy at the same time as legislation. We will continue to do that.

Chris Davies (Brecon and Radnorshire) (Con): Agricultural shows play a vital role in the social, economic and cultural life of communities right across the country. With the Royal Welsh show—the largest agricultural show in Europe, if not the world—taking place in my constituency the week after next, may we have a debate on the value of agricultural shows to rural communities? Will my right hon. Friend join me and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the Royal Welsh show?

Andrea Leadsom: I am rather delighted to confirm to my hon. Friend that I will be coming to the Royal Welsh show the week after next. I am very much looking forward to visiting the first ever UK Government stand, run by the office of the Secretary of State for Wales. My hon. Friend is right that agricultural shows play an important part in rural life and are a great way to demonstrate the best of British food and farming.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating Coia’s Café in my constituency, which is celebrating its
90th anniversary, serving delicious Italian food to the people of Glasgow? The café was opened by Carmine and Amalia Coia, Italian immigrants to the city, and has been run by the family ever since. It is currently owned by Alfredo and Antonia Coia, the third generation of the family to run the business. In this era of the hostile environment, may we have a debate in Government time on the amazing contribution that the Scots-Italian community have made to our country over the past century?

Andrea Leadsom: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman has not asked me to come and join him there—it sounds fantastic. I congratulate the Coia family on their contribution to Scottish food and to the life of Scotland and Glasgow in particular. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there have been and will continue to be many opportunities to discuss and debate the amazing contribution made by so many EU and other migrants to this country and their value in this country.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): This week, I have had meetings with both Transport for the North and Highways England to pitch a case for investment in the M56, which is clearly up and overcrowded, but all roads—pun intended—seem to lead back to a decision made at the Department for Transport. May we have a debate on the Government’s forthcoming road investment strategy part 2, so that we can make the case for extra investment for the M56?

Andrea Leadsom: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the Government’s review of the strategic road network, which will be very important. I am absolutely sure that Ministers will come to the House to set out the plans as soon as they are able to.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): Since 2010, we have seen eight Housing Ministers, with the latest one on the ministerial merry-go-round, the hon. Member for North West Hampshire (Kit Malthouse), having once said that he was happy to make life “more uncomfortable” for homeless people. I genuinely have not seen any improvement, not just in my constituency but here in London and in our other big cities. It seems as though there has been a real deterioration. Will the Government make a statement or provide time for a debate on what progress they have made on eradicating homelessness?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the issue of homelessness. We do not want to see anybody homeless or sleeping rough. We have pledged to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and to end it by 2027, and homelessness fell last year. We have committed more than £1.2 billion to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. She might like to know that we have Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 23 July.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): On Wednesday next week, I will chair a session of the all-party group on terminal illness in which we will take evidence on the impact of benefits on the terminally ill. May we have a debate in Government time on the difficulties, indignity and hardship suffered under the UK Government’s welfare policies, as outlined by the Motor Neurone Disease Association and Marie Curie and in the personal testimony of the dying?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises the serious issue of how terminally ill people are treated. It is absolutely clear that if somebody has a terminal illness they need to be treated with the utmost sensitivity. There is no need for people to self-certify that they have a terminal illness, and they now have several options as to how they would like to progress through the welfare system. They can appoint a representative, such as a doctor or friend, to provide representation for them. These things are all incredibly important. If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise a specific case, I encourage him to take it up with Ministers directly.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Following months of disruption, Northern Rail has now announced a compensation scheme for season ticket holders, but no special arrangements are being made for those who suffered disruption but did not hold season tickets, and delay repay simply does not meet the inconvenience that they suffered. May we have a debate on the compensation schemes offered to rail passengers?

Andrea Leadsom: We have all been really frustrated—sometimes at first hand, but very much on behalf of our constituents—by some of the appalling delays for rail passengers. They have been completely unacceptable, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has taken strong action to try to put the timetabling right and to ensure that all lessons are learned. It is vital that passengers get the compensation they deserve, which is why we have put in place a scheme for them to claim back up to 100% of their fares.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): I was going to ask the Leader of the House for a debate on the Brexit White Paper, but she has already announced one. Instead, may we have a debate on another shambles involving multiple plans that is running behind schedule—the electrification of the south Wales main line, which we have heard has now been delayed to an undetermined date? Great Western Railway services are regularly being cancelled or delayed, or are breaking down, offering an appalling service to my constituents in Cardiff South and Penarth.

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that this Government are presiding over the biggest investment in the rail network since Victorian times. That is absolutely vital. On electrification, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made it clear that we want to ensure that the funding will count and that we take advantage of the best technologies to give passengers the improved journeys that they rightly expect, while avoiding unnecessary disruption.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): Durham is currently reviewing its strategy to tackle obesity, including childhood obesity, and has identified a huge problem with the availability and take-up of community sports facilities. That is perhaps not surprising given the massive cuts to the council since 2020. Following a week when we have all been concentrating on sport, will the right hon. Lady make time for a debate on how her Government can better fund community sports facilities?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise the importance of sport, particularly this week. Hopefully, we will not just be sitting on our sofas...
watching it, but getting up and taking part in it. She is right that, in schools, sport, as well as an active lifestyle, is absolutely key, and I hope that she will be looking carefully and feeding into the Government’s obesity strategy as we come forward with the next phase.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): GP at Hand, a partnership between GP surgeries and Babylon, a private company, is distorting the primary care system not only in my constituency, but across London, according to the British Medical Association, by using a loophole to sign up tens of thousands of mainly young and elderly people from across the region for online medical services, thus leaving other GPs to deal with more complex and expensive conditions. May we have a debate on private sector involvement in the NHS where this puts profit above patient care?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman raises what sounds like a very concerning case, and he is right to do so. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise his specific concerns directly with Health Ministers.

Melanie Onn (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Owing to cuts by the Tory-controlled council, Scunthorpe’s citizens advice bureau is having to make redundancies, and now I hear that a loss of Lotto funding means that the Grimsby-based CAB is also having to look at its staffing. These centres are so important to the residents across northern Lincolnshire. The staff are highly trained and always professional, so, please, may we have a debate on the future funding of citizens advice bureaux?

Andrea Leadsom: I pay tribute to all of the excellent work of citizens advice bureaux right across the country. They are so often staffed by volunteers who are really trying to help their fellow citizens; it is absolutely vital work. The hon. Lady is right to raise the question of funding. It is for local authorities to make those decisions, but she might like to seek a Backbench Business debate so that all Members can share their views about what more can be done to support citizens advice bureaux.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I wonder whether the Leader of the House might find some time for this House to make some suggestions to President Trump’s itinerary. I notice that, at the moment, he seems to be going to castles, country houses and golf courses. In the light of her comments about having frank and open discussion, I wonder whether we could include in his itinerary a visit to Scunthorpe steelworks, a woman’s refuge and Winston Churchill’s home at Chartwell?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Lady might appreciate that I also said to her that I was extremely disappointed that she appears to have deliberately chosen to misunderstand my words. It was quite clear from what I said that I was talking about the problem of illegal encampments. She has kindly written to me this morning to explain that she misunderstood my words. It was quite clear from what I said that I was talking about the problem of unauthorised encampments. She has attributed to me views that I do not hold. I have the utmost respect and regard for the history and the way of life of the travelling communities and celebrates their “unique culture”.

Mr Speaker, you will be aware that Travellers are recognised as a protected race under the Equality Act 2010. I appreciate the correspondence of the Leader of the House with me today, but Traveller groups have told me that they found the exchange on 21 June hurtful, offensive, stigmatising and discriminatory. I doubt whether the terms would have been used about any other racial group. May we have your advice, Mr Speaker, on the need for respectful and non-stigmatising language in the Chamber for all ethnic minorities?

Mr Speaker: I obviously wanted the hon. Lady to have the opportunity to put her point, and the Leader of the House was notified of that and was perfectly content with that as far as I am aware and there seems to be an apposite quality about this exchange. If the Leader of the House wants to say something, we look forward to hearing her.

Andrea Leadsom: What the hon. Lady fails to mention is that I also said to her that I was extremely disappointed that she appears to have deliberately chosen to misunderstand my words. It was quite clear from what I said that I was talking about the problem of illegal encampments. She has attributed to me views that I do not hold. I have the utmost respect and regard for the history and the way of life of the travelling communities. I was utterly offended by her letter and I am offended by her point of order. I sincerely hope that she will consider carefully trying to arouse this offence to a travelling community where none was intended and absolutely none was given.
Mr Speaker: We cannot continue the debate. [Interruption.] Order. I have heard what the Leader of the House has said. We cannot have a debate on the matter today. If there is a procedural point, I will hear it, but if there is just a difference of opinion, we had better leave it there for now. The hon. Lady has expressed her point with considerable force, and the Leader of the House has responded in similar vein, putting her point of view and that seems to be appropriate.

Kate Green rose—

Mr Speaker: We cannot continue the debate. [Interruption.] Order. I have heard what the Leader of the House has said. We cannot have a debate on the matter today. If there is a procedural point, I will hear it, but if there is just a difference of opinion, we had better leave it there for now. The hon. Lady has expressed her point with considerable force, and the Leader of the House has responded in similar vein, putting her point of view and that seems to be appropriate.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Domestic Raab): With permission, Mr Speaker, I will make a statement about the UK’s future relationship with the European Union.

I pay tribute both to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) for his Herculean efforts and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker) and the wider Department for Exiting the EU team for getting us to this point in both the negotiations and the successful passage of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill through Parliament. It is a striking achievement. My right hon. Friend is a loss to Government, but I suspect, with the mildest apprehension, a considerable gain to this House.

Today, we publish the Government’s White Paper on the UK’s future relationship with the EU. It is a new and detailed proposal for a principled, pragmatic and ambitious future partnership between the UK and the EU in line with the policy agreed at Chequers last week. I have now placed a copy of the White Paper in the Libraries of both Houses.

Let me briefly set out the key proposals. The Government are determined to build a new relationship that works both for the UK and the EU: one that is grounded in our shared history, but which also looks to a bright and ambitious future; and a relationship that delivers real and lasting benefits to both sides.

First, the White Paper confirms that the UK will leave the European Union on 29 March 2019, forging a new way in the world, outside the single market and outside the customs union. It safeguard the constitutional and economic integrity of the UK. It reclaims the UK’s sovereignty and it protects our economic interests by minimising the risk of any disruption to trade. It delivers on the instruction that we received loud and clear from the British people to take back control over our laws, our borders and our money.

In delivering on this vision, the Government propose an innovative and unprecedented economic partnership based on open and free trade, maintaining frictionless trade through a new UK-EU free trade area for goods, underpinned by an ongoing common rulebook covering only those rules necessary to provide for frictionless trade at the border. This will support business and meet our shared commitments to Northern Ireland and Ireland, avoiding reliance on the so-called backstop solution. A key component of this will be our proposal for a facilitated customs arrangement—a business-friendly model that removes the need for a new routine customs check and controls between the UK and the EU, while enabling the UK to control its own tariffs to boost trade with the rest of the world. We want a deep and comprehensive deal on services, based on the principles of international trade. Our approach minimises new barriers to service provision, allowing UK firms to establish in the EU and vice versa, and provides for mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

On financial services, we propose a new economic and regulatory approach with the EU that will preserve the mutual benefits of our uniquely integrated markets, while protecting financial stability and, critically, the autonomy of our own rule making. Crucially, our proposals
on services provide the UK with regulatory flexibility in the sector, including our dynamic, innovative and digital sectors, which will in turn open up new possibilities in relation to trade with the wider world.

As we leave the EU, free movement of people will come to an end. We will control the number of people who come to our country. We will assert stronger security checks at the border. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is trying to complete his statement in circumstances in which there is manifest discontent in the Chamber. Let me say to the right hon. Gentleman, whom I welcome to his new responsibilities and whom I congratulate on his promotion to the Cabinet, that I recognise that collective decisions are made upon these matters and they are not all his individual doing. It is a source of considerable unhappiness in this Chamber, as is manifest—and has been over the last hour or so—on both sides of the House, that the right hon. Gentleman is delivering a statement about a White Paper, copies of which are not currently available to Members of the House of Commons.

I say to the right hon. Gentleman that it might be considered courteous now to indicate at the Dispatch Box if he so wishes, in terms that brook of no misunderstanding, that he is of course perfectly happy for Members to have copies of the White Paper about which it is intended that they should question him. If he would be good enough to make that clear, it would greatly assist the House. Were he not to do so, I think that the consequence in terms of Chamber unhappiness would become that much more stark.

Dominic Raab: Thank you for your warm words, Mr Speaker. The White Paper should have been made available. It will be made available as soon as is practically possible and—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for what he said. I am advised that copies are available to some people. If there are copies in the Vote Office, all I am asking is that Members should have a copy of the White Paper about which it is intended that they should question him. If he would be good enough to make that clear, it would greatly assist the House.

Dominic Raab: Yes, of course. Just for clarity, it is already available on the website for anyone who wishes to procure it that way. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I genuinely thank the Secretary of State for saying that and I appreciate that he is attempting to co-operate. As the document is in the Vote Office, but the timing of the release of the document is a matter for those who own the document—in this case, the Government—all I am asking is, is the right hon. Gentleman content that copies should be given out by the Vote Office immediately?

Dominic Raab: Yes, absolutely.

Mr Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Dr Sarah Wollaston (Totnes) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I must just say to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr Baker)—an immediate past Minister in the Brexit Department—and to the hon. Member for Totnes (Dr Wollaston), that I will not take points of order now, because the Secretary of State has to finish his statement. However, if Members are concerned that ordinarily if they leave the Chamber to get a document they are then precluded from taking part in the statement, I will waive that normal arrangement in this instance, because I am concerned to operate in a way that serves Members of the House.

Dr Wollaston: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I cannot see why there has to be a point of order now. I always attach the very greatest importance to the observations of the hon. Lady. If she wants to be heard over the Chair and explain to me privately, she may, but it foxes me as to why she needs to make any point of order now. [Interruption.]

Dr Wollaston: I am interested to see that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith) has a copy of the document. Meanwhile, let us hear the conclusion of the statement. [Interruption.] Order. I say to the Secretary of State that it would be very unseemly—discourteous to him and to the Members of the House—for his statement to be delivered while copies of the document are being distributed. I will therefore suspend the sitting of the House for five minutes. It is most regrettable that this situation has arisen, but I am dealing with it in a way that I think is constructive.

12.56 pm
Sitting suspended.

1.1 pm
On resuming—

Mr Speaker: Order. I invite the Secretary of State to continue with the delivery of his statement.

Dr Wollaston: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Just before that, I will, exceptionally, take the point of order. These situations do not arise very often, and it is very much to be hoped that they will not arise frequently in future. I say for the benefit of the people observing our proceedings that I call the hon. Lady to raise a point of order in the knowledge that she is not only the Member for Totnes and the Chair of the Health Committee but serves also as the Chair of the Liaison Committee, which embraces all the Chairs of all the Select Committees of this House.

Dr Wollaston: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Given the exceptional importance of this document, and the fact that Members on both sides of the House have not had a chance to read it in advance, may I ask, exceptionally, that you suspend the sitting for longer to give Members a chance to read it before the Secretary of State continues?

Mr Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. For her point of order, I do not think it is right for me to suspend for a sustained period off my own bat, in the expectation—perhaps even the knowledge—that there would be very strongly differing views about such a
suspension. [Interruption.] Order. Even as the hon. Lady raised her point of order, I heard Members expressing enthusiasm for the idea and Members expressing opposition. I do not think it would be the right thing to do now, in all honesty. There will be an opportunity for a general debate on our relationship with Europe post Brexit on Wednesday, and Members know that there are other opportunities to put urgent questions. I know that the hon. Lady is concerned about the legislative business on Monday. My advice to her is that she should form the clearest possible impression of Government policy and intent today before making such judgments as she and others have to make. The exchanges on this statement will be run fully. I think I will leave it there for today. I thank the Secretary of State for his forbearance.

Dominic Raab: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

As we leave the EU, free movement of people will come to an end. We will control the number of people who come to our country. We will assert stronger security checks at the border. The Government will also seek a reciprocal mobility arrangement with the EU in line with the approach we intend to take with other key trading partners around the world. In practice having ended free movement, this is about enabling firms to move their top talent across borders to deliver services, facilitating travel without a visa for tourism and business trips, and making sure that our students and youngsters in the UK and the EU continue to benefit from the educational opportunities in universities and colleges—and indeed from the rich tapestry of cultural life right across the continent.

Next, the White Paper addresses Europe’s security, which has been and will remain the UK’s security. That is why the Government have made an unconditional commitment to maintain it. The Government’s proposal is for a new security partnership with the EU to tackle the shared, complex and evolving threats, enabling the UK and the EU to act together on some of the most pressing global challenges. It is important that the UK and the EU can continue operational co-operation on law enforcement and criminal justice to keep people safe right across Europe. Our proposals extend to other areas of co-operation of vital importance to the UK and the EU, including the continued protection and exchange of personal data; new arrangements on fishing; and the co-operative accords on science and innovation, and co-operative accords on science and innovation, culture, and defence research.

When we leave the EU, the European Court will no longer have jurisdiction over this country. At the same time, we will need to be able to interpret what we have agreed accurately and consistently, and to manage any future bones of contention sensibly and responsibly. Our proposals provide for proper accountability and the consistent interpretation of UK-EU agreements by both parties. We envisage resolving disputes that may arise through arbitration. That is fair, balanced, and reflective of global practice. To provide the foundation for a new and enduring relationship, the agreement must be flexible enough to enable us to review and, if necessary, revise its operation over time in the best interests of this country, as is common in free trade agreements across the world.

I would like to make one thing very clear: we will not sign away our negotiating leverage or spend taxpayers’ money in return for nothing. The financial settlement that was agreed in December, which substantially lowered EU demands, was agreed on the basis that it would sit alongside a deep and mutually beneficial future partnership.

We agreed that we would meet our commitments as they fall due, with ever-declining payments over a finite period that add up to a tiny fraction of what would have been our net contribution. Both sides have been clear that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Indeed, that is in keeping with the spirit of article 50. There should be a firm commitment in the withdrawal agreement requiring the framework for the future relationship to be translated into legal text as soon as possible. Of course, if one party fails to honour its side of the overall bargain, there will be consequences for the whole deal. For our part, today, with the publication of this White Paper, the UK Government are demonstrating, in good faith and with good will, our ambition and resolve to ensure that we do build that deep and special partnership.

The Prime Minister first outlined the blueprint for a deep and special relationship with the EU at Lancaster House, and expanded on it further in speeches in Florence, in Munich, and at Mansion House. Those speeches have shaped and continue to shape our negotiations with the EU. I am confident that a deal is within reach, given the success of the Prime Minister and her negotiating team so far. Most issues under the withdrawal agreement have by now been resolved, with a deal in place to secure the rights of over 3 million EU citizens living in the UK and about 1 million UK citizens living in the EU. We have agreed a time-limited implementation period that gives businesses, government and citizens the certainty to plan their lives and invest for the future. We will shortly publish a White Paper on the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill setting out how we will give effect to the withdrawal agreement in domestic law and demonstrating to the EU that the UK is a dependable negotiating partner—one that will deliver on its commitments.

Our discussions with the EU will squarely focus on our shared future. This White Paper sets out how we can achieve that new partnership. Now it is time for the EU to respond in kind. We approach these negotiations with a spirit of pragmatism, compromise and, indeed, friendship. I hope and trust that the EU will engage with our proposals in the same spirit, and I plan to meet Michel Barnier next week to discuss the detail in person.

At the same time, the Government are preparing in the event that that spirit of pragmatism and good will is not reciprocated. On Monday I spoke with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and we agreed to step up our planning for the no deal scenario so that the UK is ready for Brexit no matter what the outcome of these negotiations is. That is the responsible thing for a Government to do.

This White Paper sets out the right Brexit deal, delivering on the result of the referendum; taking back control over our money, laws and borders; supporting the economy by maintaining a strong trading relationship after we have left; ending free movement while avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, or indeed between Northern Ireland and Great Britain; restoring sovereignty to Parliament and the authority of the UK Supreme Court; seizing the opportunity to forge new trade deals around the world; and maintaining co-operation with the EU in the many other areas that we prize, including security co-operation to keep our
1.11 pm

Keir Starmer (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): I welcome the new Secretary of State to his place. I am sure he does not need me to tell him the size of the task he faces, negotiating with not just the Conservative party but eventually the EU as well. Whatever our differences—and there are many—I genuinely wish him well.

I gently say that the Secretary of State has not got off to a very good start. The utter shambles of the last 20 minutes, which led to the suspension of the House during a statement, is clear evidence of why the Government are in such a mess. [Interruption.] Those on the Government Front Bench are commenting from a sedentary position. Normally I would thank the Secretary of State for advance sight of the White Paper, but on this occasion, my first question to him is: why did the Government think it appropriate to share the White Paper in full with journalists at 9 am today—I think they were given 15 minutes to read it before questions could be asked, unlike the five minutes that we adjourned for—and give them hard copies, and only to provide the Opposition with a copy three hours later? As he will know, my office has been on to his office all morning asking for this White Paper. It was delivered at 11.55 am, and we saw the shambles that followed. Why was it appropriate on this occasion, on this issue, to give it to the press at 9 am and to the Opposition three hours later?

That is not the only breach of protocol. I was handed the Secretary of State’s statement as we finished business questions. But for the point of order, it would have been courteous to proceed, because that would seem to be a courteous way in which to proceed. The conversation should be concluded and the interrogation of the Secretary of State should be allowed to begin. As for the Secretary of State’s statement, I listened very carefully to what the Secretary of State said earlier on the “Today” programme and in his statement, when he described this White Paper as “innovative”. For the record, can he confirm to the House that he does actually agree with everything in the White Paper he is presenting?

Turning to the substance, obviously we will have to look at the detail of the White Paper. The purpose of the short Chequers statement issued on Friday was to hold the Cabinet together. It clearly failed in that objective, unravelling within 48 hours. If this White Paper is more of the same, it will undoubtedly share the same fate.

Across the business community, among trade unions and, I genuinely believe, across the House, there is growing unity that the UK should remain economically close to the EU. That means negotiating a comprehensive customs union with the EU27 and a single market deal with the right balance of rights and obligations, tailored to the UK. That combination is also the only way of delivering on the solemn promise of no hard border in Northern Ireland. The White Paper falls a long way short of that.

I would like to ask the Secretary of State for a simple answer to a simple question. Is this White Paper the Government’s starting position in the next phase of the negotiations, in which case we can expect further evolution of the Government’s position, or is it the Government’s final position and as far as they are prepared to go—new red lines?

Let me develop that theme. The White Paper sets out proposals for a facilitated customs arrangement. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Conversations regularly take place between Members on respective Benches. I am not complaining about that. I simply thought it right that the conversation should be concluded and the interrogation could then continue, because that would seem to be a courteous way in which to proceed.

Keir Starmer: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I did not say anything because I assumed the Secretary of State was being briefed on the contents of the White Paper.

As for the facilitated customs arrangement, we think the proposals would be a bureaucratic nightmare, unworkable and costly for business. They rely on technology that does not currently exist. If, based on analysis, the EU27 agree with that assessment and reject the proposal on a customs arrangement, is the Government’s position that we should then negotiate a customs union with the EU, as the majority in the House think we should? On services, there is almost nothing, so again, if the Government’s proposals for mutual recognition and enhanced equivalence fail, what then?

In the short time I have had available to me, a number of features of this White Paper have leaped out. Vis-à-vis travel to work, the Secretary of State said in his statement that that was for business trips. The White Paper says that it is for “business activity”. I wonder if he could clear up the difference between the two. That is in paragraph 76 of chapter 1. Paragraph 89 of chapter 1...
Dominic Raab: May I just apologise for the late arrival of the White Paper? We will look into what happened with the Clerks. I apologise to the right hon. and learned Gentleman, and we will avoid its happening again.

I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his generous welcome. I noticed that it came in two parts, but I am genuinely looking forward to working with him at this historic crossroads for our country. Like him I am a recovering lawyer, like him I voted to trigger article 50, and at the last general election we both stood on manifestos that promised the British people we would leave the EU, so I hope he will forgive me if I remind him of that every now and again.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made a number of procedural and process points, which rather seemed to be displacement activity for anything Labour might have to say on the substance of Brexit. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I do intend to call everybody to question the Secretary of State. It is only fair that questions are heard with courtesy, and that the replies are heard with courtesy.

Dominic Raab: I am grateful, Mr Speaker.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman made some specific points. He asked if I agreed with the White Paper. Yes, of course. He asked whether the White Paper was a starting point for the negotiation or the end point. It is for the negotiation, but we are confident that it is a principled, practical approach that can deliver a lasting deal and a good deal for this country and for the EU. He made some comments about services. In fact, we are looking to make sure that we have full autonomy over rule making in relation to services, with arrangements for recognition so that we retain our services provision between the UK and the EU, but are freed up to trade in services more energetically and more liberally through the trade deals we do right across the world.

On free movement, the White Paper is clear, if the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to read it in good faith and understand our position. We have made it clear that we are ending free movement. That means we are going to take back control of our borders. It means that we will have stronger security checks at the border. It also means that we will have control over the number of people who come to this country. At the same time, we want Britain to be an open, outward-looking country. We want to encourage and facilitate business trips from the EU to the UK—that is common sense. We want to make sure there is visa waiver travel for tourism such as family holidays—that is common sense. For students and young people wanting to engage in research or go to university, or indeed to engage in the cultural activities across the continent, we obviously want to have sensible arrangements—that is common sense too.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talked about the customs union and the single market. He needs to be clear: if Labour’s position is to remain in the single market or the customs union and if, as he has said before, freedom of movement is “up for negotiation”—his words, not mine—that would break every promise every Labour candidate made at the last election to end free movement. The Government now stand ready to work with the EU over the coming weeks, ahead of the European Council in October. We must move at pace and we must negotiate with resolve to deliver the prosperous and secure future that all our peoples deserve.

Mr Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green) (Con): First, may I welcome my right hon. Friend to the Cabinet? I have believed for a long time that he should have had a place in it before. In welcoming him, I also recognise, however, that this is a very complex issue. My own personal views on this will be no secret to him. I have deep misgivings about what the Government are proposing. Having voted to leave, I voted to leave, not to half leave.

I want to raise paragraph 7d with my right hon. Friend. To pursue what the right hon. and learned Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer) said for the Opposition, we have seen very little about the migration proposals, which seem to be out there as part of what might be referred to as negotiating capital. To follow on from his question, which I think was quite legitimate, the phrase at the end of paragraph 7d is “arrangements that the UK might want to offer to other close trading partners in the future”.

My simple question is: when the Government go to discuss, negotiate or confer with the EU, whichever phrase suits, does my right hon. Friend believe that the Government will be prepared to withdraw the rights to benefits of those who come without jobs?

Dominic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. Let me give him some assurance: free movement will end; it is not up for negotiation. Equally, when countries right around the world engage in free trade negotiations, the issue of visas is often considered alongside them, and that is the approach we will take.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I, too, must wish the Secretary of State the very best of British luck in his new role.

Brexit was of course a disastrous outcome of Tory infighting, and it now looks as though the Tory compromise last week is also falling victim to Tory infighting. It is an embarrassment and massively damaging. In January
last year, the Prime Minister laid out 12 principles to underpin her Brexit process. The first was certainty and clarity, but we have had neither. The take-home from this latest Brexit White Paper seems to be that we are leaving the EU but we are putting in place regulations to comply with EU regulations on the movement of goods, so we will have no say in the decisions but we will abide by them. What mechanism will check the UK’s regulatory compliance with EU rules to allow access to the market? Will the UK use EU standards in negotiations on other trade agreements, or will there be a whole different set of standards for each agreement? Even more importantly, services make up 80% of the UK’s economy, and paragraph 48 of the White Paper says that “the UK and the EU will not have current levels of access to each other’s markets.”

That is the Government limiting the sector’s access to the world’s biggest market, which is massively damaging. What measures will the Government bring in to compensate for that bizarre and unhelpful move?

Scotland is right in the firing line of this Brexit dither and indecision—damaged yet again by Tory infighting and intransigence. Is it not time that the Government accepted that this is a wrong-headed scheme and kept us in the single market and the customs union? They would be well advised to take the measured and sensible approach recommended by the Scottish Government ahead of last week’s Joint Ministerial Committee. Will that be considered? The Government’s own analysis has shown that Brexit is massively damaging, no matter what protections are offered. Will the Government now listen to wiser heads, reverse course for everyone’s good, and stay in the single market and customs union?

Lastly, what on earth is happening in this place? Not only did the Opposition parties receive copies of the White Paper appallingly late, but it is customary for party spokespeople to have sight of statements before Ministers rise to their feet, not during the statement, as happened today. This Government’s contemptuous treatment of this Parliament has once again been laid bare for all to see.

Dominic Raab: First, the decision to leave the EU was not a decision by any political party; it was a decision by the UK in a referendum—free and fair—of which every party in this House, when the legislation providing for it was passed, agreed to respect the outcome.

In relation to goods and services, we will be taking the decision to agree to a common rulebook, because we want to mitigate any risk of friction at the border. However, this House and the Government—the UK—will have the chance to feed in to any potential changes that may occur over time through consultation. Ultimately, there is a parliamentary lock to make sure that elected Members of this House have the last word. The reality in relation to goods is that the corpus or body of law remains relatively stable. Unlike goods, services are not affected by friction at the border—they are not subject to tariffs or customs—and unlike the vast majority of manufactured goods and agri-food products, most services are not subject to specific standards. The hon. Lady complained about rule taking in relation to goods and then she complained about our not being subject in relation to services. That made no sense at all.

Sir William Cash (Stone) (Con): I am deeply worried about the proposals I have read already in the White Paper and in the three-page document that we received the other day, for this reason. On the issue of the sovereignty of Parliament, we passed the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, which repeals the European Communities Act 1972, but under the proposals as I read them—the so-called parliamentary lock, and compliance with a common rulebook—for dealing with regulatory rule taking from the EU and the discussions that will place around it, page 91 of the document tells us that rule changes will be scrutinised “in accordance with normal legislative procedure”, and that “Parliament could decide” not to enact them. I understand what that is getting at, but if I may say so, I assure the House, as Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee and having been on that Committee for 33 years, that never in my experience—despite what was promised in the White Paper in 1971, before the 1972 Act—has there ever been an occasion when the House has overturned a European regulation, which puts me on serious caution. I therefore have to ask: how would this system work in practice, would it be Whip-ridden, and would the so-called parliamentary lock be burglary-proof?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments and pay tribute to his huge experience in this area. On parliamentary scrutiny and the UK’s ability to control any changes to the common rulebook for goods, as I said, let us be clear that we would expect to have a proper dialogue about any changes that were made on both sides and there would be a parliamentary lock to ensure proper democratic oversight in translating those changes into legislation in this country. If this House and Parliament decided not to do that, that would have consequences for the agreement, and that would feed back into the review mechanisms and dispute resolution mechanism that we have carefully tailored. We have sought that balanced approach to ensure we have consistent interpretation of the rules that we will apply in that area, while retaining democratic oversight in this House.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): May I say to you, Mr Speaker, that I hope a new principle has been established today that, in future, Members of the House will receive copies of White Papers at the same time as members of the fourth estate? In welcoming, genuinely, the Secretary of State to his post—a post that has many challenges—I may I suggest that he organise a briefing for Members of the House, with officials, on the White Paper, in line with the very helpful briefing that was held on Monday on the Chequers agreement?

In the statement on the Chequers agreement, the Government said that they would “commit by treaty” to ongoing harmonisation with EU rules on goods. If the facilitated customs arrangement is agreed by the EU, will it be ready to be implemented by 31 December 2020? If not, what arrangements do the Government propose to put in place to cover the gap there would then be between that date and the date on which the new arrangements would finally and fully come into effect?

Mr Speaker: Before the Secretary of State replies, let me say that I entirely accept what the right hon. Gentleman has just said. For the avoidance of doubt, and for future
good practice, it must be accepted that documents about which statements are to be made should not first be released to the media, even under protected conditions—other than in the most exceptional circumstances—before being released to Members of the House. The Secretary of State is a very assiduous parliamentarian and a person of great courtesy, so it seems to me obvious that he will readily accept that.

When a point is made with such force by the Chair of a Select Committee, and a similar point is made by the Chair of the Liaison Committee, I think I am right in saying that that point brooks no contradiction.

**Dominic Raab:** I certainly accept your point, Mr Speaker, and I will take away and consider carefully the suggestion made by the right hon. Member for Leeds Central (Hilary Benn). He asked about implementation of the agreement and whether we will be ready. To some degree that depends on the precise contours of the deal that we strike with the EU, but we are straining every sinew to ensure that all the preparations, both legislative and administrative, are in place to ensure that we deliver on any deal that we strike with the EU.

**Mr Steve Baker** (Wycombe) (Con): Without wishing to be at all indiscreet, paragraph 54 on page 95 of the White Paper, regarding legislation, puts me in mind of discussions about the negotiability of my preferred way of implementing the withdrawal agreement and implementation Bill, in relation to the implementation period. For what reason does the Secretary of State think that he can negotiate with the EU a mechanism that does not accept the principles in the European Communities Act 1972, that is, that EU law where we accept the acquis comes directly into our law, without this Parliament having a veto?

**Dominic Raab:** I pay tribute again to my hon. Friend for all his work as a Minister and tireless parliamentarian in this House. In reality, no off-the-shelf model will work for the bespoke relationship that we need with the EU. It is imperative to give effect to the referendum and take back control over our borders, our laws and our money, but at the same time we must forge a new relationship, given the long-standing and deep relationship we need with the EU for all his work as a Minister and tireless parliamentarian in those areas that both sides prize.

I think it is replicated on both sides—to continue co-operation that we have had as an EU member, and our desire—which he said in 2016 that Tory MPs might push for a referendum after 2020 if the remain side were to win, so I assume he will be backing calls for a final say on it the better, because it will save the Government a lot of time. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post. I have found him to be a very good Minister to do business with. I hope, however, that today has shown that the Secretary of State to his position—he has had his degree that depends on the precise contours of the deal that the more the Government try to use the powers of the Communities Act 1972, that is, that EU law where we accept the acquis comes directly into our law, without this Parliament having a veto.

**Dominic Raab:** I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, and in my earlier remarks I addressed points about how in practice this House will retain scrutiny. Under the facilitated customs arrangement, up to 96% of UK goods trade is likely to pay the correct or no tariff at the border. I hope that that gives him a sense of the minimisation of disruption that we will achieve.

**Chris Bryant** (Rhondda) (Lab): The problem still remains that there is no majority for this in the House of Commons—to be honest, the sooner we have a vote on it the better, because it will save the Government a lot of time. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his post. I have found him to be a very good Minister to do business with. I hope, however, that today has shown that the more the Government try to use the powers of the Executive to skirt around the side of Parliament, the less likely they are to achieve an agreement in the House that can eventually be sold to the European Union. I urge him to work with all Members of the House to try to get a better deal. Otherwise, we will fall out of the European Union without a deal, and that will harm our security.

**Dominic Raab:** I respect the hon. Gentleman's views, and even though we differ on this issue, we agree on many other things. I will certainly take up the offer to work with him in future as the negotiations and legislation unfold. I say gently, however, that all Labour and Conservative Members stood at the last election on manifestos that committed to leaving the EU. We cannot leave the EU and stay in the single market and the customs union. No amount of haggling over procedural or process points can mask the divisions among Labour Members, or their failure to take a decision about what their position on Brexit should be.

**Dr Sarah Wollaston** (Totnes) (Con): I thank you for your comments, Mr Speaker. I welcome the Secretary of State to his post, but I do not think it possible for Members to question him about the White Paper without having had a chance to read it. He said that he will step
up planning for a no-deal scenario. Will he commit to publishing the consequences of no deal for individuals, communities and the economy, so that we can all assess what its impact will be?

Dominic Raab: I respect my hon. Friend’s views, and I know she takes a close interest in these matters. I seem to remember that under previous Administrations statements and hard-copy documents were received very late, but I have apologised for what happened today, and I will endeavour to ensure that it is not repeated. On her broader point, we have tough choices to make, and the White Paper seeks to reconcile the challenge of ensuring that we leave the customs union, with all the benefits of that and opportunities to be grasped, while also minimising any potential disruption to trade. I will release more details to the House about our no-deal planning in due course.

Yvette Cooper (Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford) (Lab): Only 20 paragraphs of the White Paper are about immigration, and they are very narrow—they just talk about business transfers, temporary business services, tourists and students. There is no reference to what would happen if, for example, the NHS wanted to recruit long term from the EU, perhaps for nurses or care workers. Is that because the Government are ruling out any provisions to support long-term recruitment, or because they have not yet worked out how that would happen? Also, does the Secretary of State agree that it is really important that, as we discuss immigration reform, none of us reverts to the kind of divisive language we heard during the referendum campaign?

Dominic Raab: I thank the right hon. Lady for those points. The White Paper actually sets out the position very clearly: we are ending free movement but we want to take a sensible approach to matters such as business trips, holiday travel, research and students coming from the EU to the UK, and vice versa. Of course, we will consider the matter further when my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary brings forward that legislation. As we have said on free trade agreements that we will be forging with countries around the world, the issue of visas will be subject to those negotiations, just as with the EU.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): My right hon. Friend’s commitment to animal welfare is well known. Can he assure the House that there that will not be the case, and we will keep that in mind as we proceed with the legislation and with the negotiations.

Dominic Raab: I have checked very carefully to ensure that that will not be the case, and we will keep that in mind as we proceed with the legislation and with the negotiations.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Only half a page of this document is about health—and that relates to infectious diseases—despite a recent Health Committee report stating clearly that patients’ lives and safety will be in danger if there is any interruption at all to the supply of vital medicines and medical equipment into this country. How is the Secretary of State going to guarantee that there will be no such interruption, and avoid the kind of scenario in which patients’ lives and safety are put at risk?

Dominic Raab: The NHS is already making sure that we have all the plans in place to provide the drugs and the doctors and nurses that we need. Of course, with regard to our approach to visas and immigration more broadly, we can ensure, because we are taking back control of our immigration policy, that we have the right checks in place, whoever they are for, including nurses and doctors, and that for medicines and other goods we have the right approach for the country.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Worthing West) (Con): The House will have heard with interest the suggestion that both the House and the Government should consider whether papers can be released to MPs at the same time as they are released to the press, because Select Committee reports have had the same kinds of procedures as the Government have up to now.

People should be aware that my right hon. Friend, whom I welcome to his new post, received a Sergei Magnitsky human rights award last November for political campaigning on a cross-party basis. We hope that his progress on exiting the EU will have the same kind of cross-party support, because most voters and most MPs want to see progress.

As the European Union cannot make an agreement with us until we have left, what will the procedures be to ensure that the agreements we make with it after implementation will be carried through?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend. We have made it very clear that there is no deal until the whole deal is done. That means that, in relation to the sequential nature of these negotiations, there will be a link between the two. If, having agreed the withdrawal agreement, we found that progress towards the future trade and special partnership arrangements was not proceeding at pace, there would be consequences for the rights and obligations that the UK has undertaken, including financial obligations.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): In welcoming the Secretary of State to his post, may I add my voice to the idea that it is nonsense that we got this White Paper so late? Can he confirm that Angela Merkel did not have a copy before we did? Will he state categorically that after we leave the European Union no person living in a Commonwealth country will be treated any differently from how anyone living in the EU will be treated, in relation to being able to come to this country? We should have equal rights for everyone living in the world, rather than giving special rights to those living in the EU.

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for her long-standing interest in this matter and her pugnacious campaigning in the run-up to the referendum. Of course, we are ending free movement, which will allow us to avoid what is effectively a discriminatory approach to those coming from outside the EU. The Home Secretary will be bringing forward legislation to deal with the detail, and of course it will be part of the negotiation process with our EU partners.
Mr Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): Paragraph 7 of chapter 1 of the White Paper states that the UK’s proposal is to “maintain a common rulebook for goods, including agri-food”. Lobbyists estimate that there are currently 170,000 pages of the acquis communautaire. How many of those pages will have to be re-legislated back into UK law and, once they are there, will they ever be amendable?

Domestic Raab: I hope that I can reassure my right hon. Friend, because we want the common rulebook to ensure that manufacturers can continue to produce one product for both markets, preventing dual production, but the common rulebook will apply only to the extent that it is necessary to avoid friction at the border.

Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): Paragraph 6 of the conclusion states: “If the House of Commons supports a resolution to approve the Withdrawal Agreement and the Future Framework, the Government will bring forward the Withdrawal Agreement and Implementation Bill to give the Withdrawal Agreement legal effect in the UK.” It says nothing about what will happen if the House of Commons does not approve the withdrawal agreement. What does the Secretary of State believe will happen in those circumstances? Given his past views, many of us suspect that what he will do is drive us towards a no-deal situation.

Domestic Raab: Let me reassure the hon. Gentleman. As set out in my earlier remarks, and indeed in the White Paper, we are striving, in good faith and with good will, with some innovation and principle, but also with a practical approach, to get the best deal for the UK, but one that is also likely to be acceptable and achievable with our EU partners and friends. We are preparing for every eventuality, but I can reassure him that, as I have always said, the optimum outcome will be to deliver a deal that is good for this country and good for the EU.

Mr David Jones (Clwyd West) (Con): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his well-deserved appointment. I am sure that he will understand that I have not yet had the opportunity to read the White Paper in the degree of detail that I would have liked. Nevertheless, I see from page 11 that the role of the European Court of Justice is preserved through a joint reference procedure as the interpreter of EU rules. Can he say how that is compatible with the removal of the United Kingdom from the jurisdiction of the ECJ? As a practical matter, what right of audience would British advocates have, given that the UK will no longer be a member of the European Union?

Domestic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. In relation to the ECJ, there is provision for reference where that is necessary for the consistent interpretation of the law. That could only be done through the joint committee to which he refers agreeing, so the UK would have a veto over that—it would have to be with UK agreement. It could also be done by an arbitration panel, but—he will know this—what makes international arbitration different from accepting ECJ jurisdiction is that we would have arbitrators on those panels, so it would be done with their agreement as well. This is not the same as having jurisdiction over disputes; it is making sure, where it is in the UK’s interests—and it will be—that there is consistent application of the common rules that we want to work effectively.

Pete Wishart (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): I think that the way this statement commenced sums up the whole chaotic and clueless Brexit, as prosecuted by this shambles of a Government. The White Paper was supposed to deliver Cabinet unity, but all it has done, as we have seen, is demonstrate the divisions. Scotland did not vote for any of this, so can the Secretary of State perhaps suggest a way that Scotland might be spared this madness?

Domestic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. I can give him the reassurance that it would not be part of the withdrawal agreement process; it would be part of the future deep and special relationship. In the same way as we approach global free trade with partners from Latin America to Asia, when we look at the liberalisation of trade in goods, for example, through the reduction of tariffs or services, we can also ensure that we have sensible arrangements on visas.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): My speed-reading skills are not perfect, but I only noticed two references to the overseas territories: one on page 96 and one in the conclusions. What does this White Paper mean for British overseas territories? Does it mean that they, and particularly Gibraltar, will be treated in exactly the same way as the UK during any transition period?

Domestic Raab: Yes. The overseas territories will retain the status that they have. We are, of course, consulting with them and, indeed, with the devolved Administrations right the way through this process.

Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): The Chequers agreement indicated that Parliament will have the right to reject future EU rules, but how will it ever exercise that power when the White Paper commits to an “upfront choice to commit by treaty to ongoing harmonisation with the relevant EU rules”?

Domestic Raab: I thank my right hon. Friend. It will be done through the parliamentary lock, which means that this House ultimately can decide what goes into UK law, consistent with the outcome of the referendum. Of course, if we decide to renege on the commitment or to divert from the common rulebook, that will have consequences for the relationship that we strike with the EU. That is why there are review mechanisms and other
mechanisms for resolving disputes, as and when they arise. In any international treaty that will provide a sustainable, enduring basis for the deep ties that we have with the EU on trade and security, we need to make sure that we have sensible proposals and mechanisms for ironing out creases in the relationship as they arise.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): May I return again to paragraph 76? The Secretary of State said a few moments ago that he expected that future mobility arrangements in relation to industry needs for labour would be made through the medium of individual trade agreements, but business is already concerned about labour shortages in sectors such as care, hospitality, retail and agriculture. Does he really think that his answer offers the security of labour supply that business needs to know now that it will have in the immediate future?

Dominic Raab: Yes, we can cater for the needs of businesses and the UK economy without having an open-door approach to immigration.

Andrew Bridgen (North West Leicestershire) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. While I and many colleagues may have grave concerns about the contents of the White Paper, I hope that we all agree on the importance of his role in delivering the Brexit that we promised the British people. To that end, it is very important that he has the right support and help going forward, so has he had any explanation why his first choice of special adviser—namely, Stewart Jackson, the former Member for Peterborough—was vetoed by the Cabinet Office?

Dominic Raab: I pay tribute to the great work that all the special advisers have done, including Stewart Jackson, and all the officials, who work tirelessly with Ministers to get the best deal for this country. I will be naming my special advisers shortly, as people would expect in the normal course of a reshuffle or a change in ministerial post.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The intergovernmental agreement signed between the Welsh Government and the British Government was meant to result in equitable decision making on Brexit policy. Does not the fact that the Welsh Government were not even consulted on the contents of the White Paper indicate that that agreement is not worth the paper it is written on and that the Labour Government of my country was extremely naive to trust the British Government?

Dominic Raab: I respect the hon. Gentleman, but I am afraid that he is just wrong on this. Sections of the White Paper were shared with the devolved Administrations and copies of it were sent in advance.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): I spent the past couple of days on a business trip, or perhaps it was an activity to do business, meeting former colleagues from across Europe and asking them what they thought about the potential proposals. There is a complete understanding that if we want to keep an open border with Ireland, we must have common standards on goods and that if we want to keep the UK united, we need that to apply to all the UK, so I wish my right hon. Friend the best of luck in his future job, because many people across Europe want to help to deliver this partnership.

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend. I agree that that has been the feedback that we have had. We can want to end free movement without saying that we will pull up the drawbridge. We need to have a balanced approach to immigration that not only protects and services the skills gap in this country, but makes sure that we deal with the pressures and costs of immigration and that we restore public confidence in the immigration system.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): The proposals on freedom of movement in the White Paper will please no one. There is no certainty for resident EU citizens or for those seeking to come here after 2020. The list of exceptions is so wide and so unclear that it has already been rejected by the hard Brexiteers. The message seems to be, “You can stay or come here, but you are not welcome,” and to my mind, that is both incompetent and unpleasant. I had the Secretary of State down as neither of those things before today, so I wonder why he wants to be associated with this document.

Dominic Raab: Because it takes a balanced approach to immigration, rather than pretending that we can continue with the legacy of the previous Government, who had an open-door approach to immigration, which destroyed public trust in the system. We need to take advantage of the economic benefits and control the pressures. That is the sensible approach.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): The thing that I hear most often from my constituents in Redditch, however they voted, is, “Just get on with it.” Will my right hon. Friend confirm from the Dispatch Box that nothing in this White Paper will lead to a second referendum, which will only delay or frustrate the democratic will of my constituents and the British people?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We need to crack on with these negotiations. I will be going to Brussels next week. The idea of a second referendum, as I think the leader of the Liberal Democrats acknowledged before he ascended to his elevated position, would be not only unplanned but totally counter-productive to public trust in practice.

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods (City of Durham) (Lab): People across the country who work in our universities will want to know that any Brexit deal continues to give them access to European research funding and networks. These networks are really important for business development for medicine and innovation across the piece. While the White Paper says that “the UK wishes to explore association in research and innovation programmes”, that prompts the question what the Government have been doing for the past two years. Do people who work in higher education not deserve more certainty than a wish list?

Dominic Raab: I gently say to the hon. Lady that the insistence on trying to sequence the negotiations was on the EU’s behalf. We have been consistently saying that
we need to get on to the wider post-withdrawal relationship as soon as possible, but we are keen to do that and I hope that the White Paper gives the hon. Lady a sense that this will be a priority for the Government.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): How can my right hon. Friend justify the use of the adjective “common” in describing the noun “rulebook”, when he has committed to ongoing harmonisation? Even with a parliamentary process, it is their rulebook, is it not?

Dominic Raab: I understand the concerns that my right hon. Friend and others will have about this. We are proposing to sign up to a common rulebook. There will be an opportunity to influence it through consultation. There will be a parliamentary lock. As I said, if this is not in the UK’s interests, there will be an opportunity to revise the arrangements, but the reality is that the common rulebook on manufactured goods, where a risk would be creating friction at the border, has remained relatively stable over recent years, so I do not think that in practice it would lead to the fears that he has understandably outlined.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): The leader of the European Research Group, the hon. Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg), described this White Paper as “the greatest vassalage since King John paid homage to Philip II at Le Goulet in 1200. This White Paper has not needed age to turn yellow”—presumably he can give us an eyewitness account. The Opposition’s concern, as is clear from the resignations that we have already seen from the Government, is that this White Paper—the Government’s negotiating position—does not command at this stage the support of a majority of the House of Commons. How does the Secretary of State possibly expect the united front of the EU27 Governments, the European Commission and the European Parliament to take this Government at all seriously, because this House clearly does not?

Dominic Raab: The hon. Gentleman has produced all sorts of quotations, while blithely skating over the divisions in his own party. The fact is that these are complex issues on which views diverge, and people feel very passionate about them. What we have set out is a positive, principled but also flexible approach that is deliverable. We will go and negotiate with the EU, and we will ensure that we get the best deal for the country. Simply sitting on the sidelines and carping and hoping that somehow the Brexit decision will be reversed is, I am afraid, to be on a fool’s errand.

Mr Marcus Jones (Nuneaton) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. My constituents voted to leave the EU for a number of reasons. Among them was the principle of freedom of movement. Can my right hon. Friend categorically assure my constituents that freedom of movement will end as a result of his and the Government’s plans and that this Parliament will consequently be able to decide whom we welcome to our great country?

Dominic Raab: Absolutely. Free movement will end. We still want to take a sensible approach to immigration, but we want to ensure that, as elected Members who are accountable to our constituents, we in the House have the last say on it.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State intend to produce any kind of detailed regional economic impact assessments, so that we can fully understand the scale of the damage to jobs, livelihoods and living standards in the north-east that would be caused by what his Government are proposing?

Dominic Raab: We will make sure that there is appropriate analysis as the negotiations progress and the various documents—whether in the legislation or in the agreements—are put before the House for proper scrutiny in the usual way.

Andrew Jones (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. Can he confirm that the UK will resume its seat at the World Trade Organisation and be able to do trade deals throughout the world?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We will resume our seat at the WTO. Given some of the pressures for protectionism that we have heard from all sides, it will be hugely important for the Government and the country to take up our role as a global champion of free trade, because it is good for businesses, good for consumers and, of course, good for the very poorest countries in the world, which want to trade their way to genuine economic independence.

Wayne David (Caerphilly) (Lab): Paragraph 6 of chapter I of the White Paper states that “the UK recognises that the Single Market is built on a balance of rights and obligations, and that the UK cannot have all the benefits of membership of the Single Market without its obligations.” Are the Government prepared to discuss the possibility of making financial contributions for the privilege of having access to that European market?

Dominic Raab: We have already set out what we are going to do in relation to the financial settlement in the withdrawal agreement. We will settle our accounts and ensure that in respect of those parts of the EU project, whether Eurojust or whatever it may be, we pay our way.

Mr William Wragg (Hazel Grove) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. I cannot help feeling a little sorry for him at this time. Is he sure that there is not another document, developed with and previewed by other Governments, which is being cooked up behind the scenes by Mr Robbins and our former friend the Prime Minister’s chief of staff and which will then be wheeled out to further undermine the previously stated positions of Her Majesty’s Government?

Dominic Raab: Yes.

Daniel Zeichner (Cambridge) (Lab): On page 78 of the White Paper, which deals with science and innovation, there is talk of association with and participation in research schemes in the future. Back in May, the Prime Minister talked about having influence in those schemes. Why has the ambition been so watered down?
those kinds—as we do with countries around the world—without being a member of the political club, with all the fetters on our democratic prerogatives.

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): I join you, Mr Speaker, and others in welcoming my right hon. Friend to his post. I also welcome the repeated and continuing confirmation from the Government that we are indeed leaving the common fisheries policy. I do not regard that as being any longer in question. However, will he also confirm that no amount of guaranteed and continued access to British waters will be given away during withdrawal negotiations and that the sharing of fishing opportunities will be agreed only during ongoing annual negotiations after we take our place as an independent coastal state?

Dominic Raab: I can confirm that we will be leaving the common fisheries policy and that we will proceed as an independent coastal state with control over our waters in respect of fisheries and other matters.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): Paragraph 55 of the White Paper, on page 95, states—without a hint of irony—

“...the Government has already demonstrated during the passage of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill that it will actively engage with suggestions from both Houses about the oversight of secondary legislation, adapting scrutiny arrangements as appropriate, and recognising the quality and expertise in the existing scrutiny structures in the Commons and the Lords.”

In the light of today’s shambolic performance, would the Minister care to enlighten us on what parliamentary scrutiny really means, in his eyes?

Dominic Raab: As the hon. Gentleman knows, it means what we are doing right now; and there will be plenty of further opportunities to scrutinise the White Paper in this House, in the other place and in Select Committees.

Helen Whately (Faversham and Mid Kent) (Con): I, too, welcome my right hon. Friend to his post. I have noticed that today he has had to field questions about the Government’s future negotiating strategy which it would clearly not have been in the national interest for him to answer. Does he agree that, even during passionate debates like this, we must put our country first, not our party or any personal ambitions?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend asked about the money. I took some time to set out in my response that we have made clear the need for a link between the obligations that we undertake in the withdrawal agreement and what we then expect in relation to the future partnership deal on trade, security and other areas in which there is co-operation.

That needs to be looked at as a whole. If one side, whichever it may be, does not fulfil its side of the bargain, there will be consequences for the whole deal—and yes, that would include the money.

Ms Angela Eagle (Wallasey) (Lab): The White Paper says very little about the service industry, particularly financial services, except that we want to retain our access to integrated markets while not really sticking to the rules. Is that not more like having your cake and eating it, and is it not highly unlikely that the EU will ever agree to such an approach?

Dominic Raab: It is clear that the UK cannot remain under the EU passporting regime, which is intrinsic to membership of the EU. Our objective, based on that, is to agree a new economic and regulatory partnership in financial services. The new partnership will set some binding bilateral commitments to give firms certainty and stability in respect of access to each other’s markets, while allowing the UK and the EU to maintain and exercise autonomy when it comes to regulatory decisions and rule-making.

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend to his position. Given the brief period he has been in post, he is giving a performance of very high calibre.
On free movement, while I accept that many colleagues share the noble position that we should not have a discriminatory system, does my right hon. Friend accept that there is a big implication for unskilled migration, because if we allow it in future, we will have to allow it from anywhere, not just the EU? Does he accept that in those circumstances, non-EU migration would inevitably rise?

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and that is why we take the approach that we do. We want to ensure that when we have an enhanced preferential trade relationship with a country, visas can go into the mix. That is the global practice right around the world. But it is crucial, as a matter of sound policy but also for retaining public trust in our migration system, that we have control over things people care about: the numbers of people coming here; ensuring the people coming here are self-sufficient; and making sure that if people threaten this country or commit criminal offences, they can be removed.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Having attended the welcome briefing on the previous agreement but without having had much time to scrutinise the White Paper, will the Secretary of State clarify for me and my constituents how the eye-wateringly complicated fudge around the facilitated customs arrangement can be anything but a disaster for manufacturing, particularly the bed manufacturers of Batley and Spen?

Dominic Raab: The FCA is an innovative new model; it is a business-friendly model that seeks to facilitate the greatest possible—[Interruption.] The hon. Lady is complaining about it, but I am trying to explain it to her and she might just take a moment to listen to the explanation. The FCA seeks to facilitate the greatest possible trade between the UK and the EU and, when put in place, it will make sure that up to 96% of UK goods trade is likely to pay the correct or no tariff at the border. The key difference between the FCA and the previous arrangements under the proposed customs partnership, is that tariff revenue will be levied up front rather than be reimbursed after the event, which Conservative Members agree would be more cumbersome and less effective in minimising the risk to trade.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I welcome the publication of the White Paper, but these are complex issues, and what my constituents, and indeed I, want is reassurance that this document will indeed return control over our borders, our money and our laws. Will my right hon. Friend join me in suggesting that people should not listen to some of the more siren voices around, but instead look at the detail of this document, see where it delivers on those pledges, and then make their decision?

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): This morning’s chaos is entirely consistent with a Government who have dodged scrutiny in this House at every turn, and to suggest to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford North (Wes Streeting) that he is shouting from the sidelines when he is actually speaking from the Benches of this House only serves to amplify that. May I draw the Secretary of State’s attention to paragraph 76, which states that the economic partnership providing reciprocal arrangements would “support businesses to provide services and to move their talented people”? What does “talented” mean and does it include, for example, nurses and care workers?

Dominic Raab: When people need to move high-skilled members of staff across borders, it is key that, no matter what the sector, we have the ability to do that. Our negotiations with the EU can of course include all sectors, and we want to make sure that where there are skills gaps, they can be plugged.

James Heappey (Wells) (Con): In paragraph 138 the Government rightly commit to a continuation of the single energy market between Northern Ireland and Ireland. Rather than making a special case for Northern Ireland, may I encourage the Secretary of State to consider not leaving the Europe-wide internal energy market and instead make a special case for energy all together? That would be spectacularly boring and uncontentious, and just remaining within the internal energy market would allow us to be interconnected with Ireland as well as our friends across the channel and the North sea?

Dominic Raab: That is an interesting point. We set out our proposals in the White Paper, but of course if my hon. Friend would like to write to me with the details of his suggestions as the negotiations and legislation proceed, I will be happy to look at them carefully.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): The White Paper clearly envisages a role for the ECJ in perpetuity, for instance in relation to trade disputes. Has the Secretary of State had any indication from the EU that it is prepared to participate in the arbitration process proposed in this White Paper and second-guess ECJ decisions?

Dominic Raab: It is not right to say that the ECJ would have jurisdiction over trade disputes; that would be the role of the arbitration mechanism. International arbitration is a global mechanism used by countries around the world, and I do not see any reason why, within Europe or in relation to the EU, there would be an anomaly. The ECJ deals with the laws in place within the EU and member states in the same way as the UK Supreme Court deals with the laws of the land in this country. International arbitration is designed to be flexible; it allows arbitrators from all countries to make sure that we deal with international disputes and it is perfectly consistent with global trade practice.

Chris Philp (Croydon South) (Con): Many of my constituents are concerned that we must be able to strike independent new free trade deals after leaving. Can the new Secretary of State, whom I welcome to his
place—we will miss him at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government—confirm that we will be able to strike those new trade agreements, and is not the Swiss example a good one? The Swiss have these associations with the EU on product standards, yet have managed to do very good free trade agreements recently, including with India and China.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is right, and he is well-versed in international trade practice. The key advantage in our approach is that we have the ability to remove the EU external tariff, to reduce tariffs as a World Trade Organisation member, and to sign bilateral free trade deals, which is crucial in terms of our leverage. For services, we will not be bound by the rules of the EU, and can take advantage of that not just in the wider services sector but in particular in financial services, and the digital sector, which is so important for the future jobs this country will rely on.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It has taken this Government two years to publish what is just a big set of wish lists. Paragraph 63: “the UK proposes a new economic…arrangement with the EU in financial services”;
paragraph 130: “explore options for…an Air Transport Agreement”;
paragraph 134: “explore options for reciprocal access for road hauliers”;
paragraph 140: “explore…options for the future energy relationship”;
and paragraph 143, explore a close relationship with Euratom.

So it has taken the Government two years to state the blindingly obvious. What superhuman negotiation skills does the Secretary of State have to be able to close out these issues in the next three to four months?

Dominic Raab: Lots of these issues are complex, and of course we have been guided, or restricted to some degree, by the sequential approach of the EU. But lots of thought and consultation has gone into this, and we do now need to move at pace to get cracking with the other side, in good faith and with goodwill, to get this deal done.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): I warmly welcome the Secretary of State to his post. He will be aware that the west midlands economy has had one of the strongest export performances of any region of the UK. Can he give an assurance that this White Paper does not preclude us from doing trade agreements around the world, to help west midlands businesses and create jobs in the west midlands, which is of great importance to my constituents?

Dominic Raab: I thank my hon. Friend, and I am confident that as we leave the EU with a good deal, businesses in the west midlands will go from strength to strength. We must also acknowledge that if we are signing up to the common rulebook on goods, to the extent that that is needed to reduce friction at the border between the EU and UK, that will, at least to some degree, tie our hands. However, the huge advantage we have if we leave the EU and the customs union is that we can remove and reduce tariffs, and we will have control over the services side of things, so we can have control over regulation. That is a huge advantage. If we take those opportunities, we will, for the west midlands and whole UK, be able to boost trade.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): One of the major, and understandable, arguments during the referendum was that when we joined the EU in 1973 people did not really understand what it was going to lead to. Does my right hon. Friend, whom I really welcome to his post, therefore recognise the great importance of communicating what is proposed here and what is eventually put to Parliament to the general public, in particular the young people who are going to have to live with this for the next 30, 40 or more years, as well as to Parliament itself? Sometimes this debate can seem to be expressed in very dry terms, so it is absolutely vital that this communication is there and the discussion is there with the public as a whole.

Dominic Raab: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I remember how insightful he was when we served on the Brexit Committee together. It is true that this needs to avoid being a Westminster bubble conversation, and I have already had meetings with business groups from the CBI to the Federation of Small Businesses to ensure that the views of the diversity of the business community are fed through and that I understand them properly. He is also right to say that we need to go out and sell the message that, yes, Brexit is about managing the risks involved in any changing relationship, but also that there are huge opportunities for us to grasp, including for the young people of this country.

Nigel Huddleston (Mid Worcestershire) (Con): My constituents are a realistic, sensible and practical lot and, unlike some politicians, they know that they will not always get 100% of what they want in life, but they do expect their politicians to deliver. Before the referendum, the 58% of my constituents who voted for Brexit told me clearly that what they wanted was control of their borders, control of their laws, an end to freedom of movement and to stop spending billions of pounds in Europe for reasons that they could not really understand. In very simple terms, Secretary of State, will this deal deliver on what my constituents want?

Dominic Raab: Yes, it will, and we need to proceed at pace with our negotiations with our EU friends to make that happen. At the same time, we need to ensure that we are ready for any eventuality in the negotiations. However, we are not looking to rely on those contingency plans; we are looking to get the very best deal, and in this White Paper, we have achieved it.
Global Britain and the Western Balkans

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Select Committee statement

Mr Speaker: We now come to the Select Committee statement. The hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) will speak on his subject for up to 10 minutes, during which, I remind colleagues, no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of his statement, the Chair will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call the hon. Gentleman to respond to them in turn. I call Mr Mike Gapes to speak on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Committee.

2.21 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Foreign Affairs Committee’s latest report, “Global Britain and the Western Balkans”, was published last Friday, ahead of the fifth annual western Balkans summit, which took place in London on Monday and Tuesday. The summits are part of an intergovernmental forum called the Berlin process, which brings together the leaders of six western Balkan countries—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia—and of some EU member states including Germany and France. The object is to accelerate reforms in order to help the western Balkan six to become mature democracies and ultimately to qualify for EU membership. That is something that all six want.

With all that happened at the start of this week—not least the resignation of the host, the Foreign Secretary, on Monday—the summit did not get the attention it deserved. However, we should not underestimate its significance. It was an important moment for the western Balkan six, giving them a chance to prove that they could put their animosities behind them and work towards a common goal—namely, EU membership. It was also important for the UK. The German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, invited the UK to host the summit for the first time, as a test of the UK’s commitment to European security and of our capacity to remain a serious player in the western Balkans. The Committee awaits the Government’s written response to the report, to judge whether the UK passed the test.

Many Members will vividly remember the wars of the 1990s that tore the western Balkans apart, from Croatia in the north to Kosovo in the south. As we know, the disintegration of Yugoslavia unleashed centuries-old ethnic tensions, leading to some of the worst violence against civilian non-combatants in Europe since world war two. This culminated in atrocities such as the siege of Sarajevo and the massacre at Srebrenica, which began 23 years ago yesterday and which many of us have been remembering and commemorating at events this week. In total, more than 100,000 people were killed in the region between 1990 and 1999.

The region has come a long way since then, and there are reasons to be hopeful. In June, for example, Macedonia reached an agreement with Greece to end their 25-year running dispute about the name of the country. On the back of that, NATO yesterday invited the Republic of North Macedonia to begin accession talks, subject to the ratification of the name agreement. This shows that the region can overcome its problems peacefully.

As encouraging as this is, however, our Committee heard evidence to suggest that the region is in a fragile position and that its progress cannot be taken for granted. It suffers from many interconnected problems, including rampant corruption, a culture of clientism, sophisticated organised crime, a weak civil society and, sadly, some leaders who pay lip service to reform but show authoritarian tendencies. There are also ethnic tensions, as well as some bilateral disputes. The British Council has told us that the western Balkans are experiencing a new phase of instability and that the progress made since the 1990s cannot be taken for granted. Given the fragility of the region, the Committee concluded that it is vital that the UK and its EU and NATO partners and allies remain engaged, but that they must recognise the risks involved and acknowledge that it will take a long time to make a substantive difference on the ground.

The people of the western Balkans believe that EU membership will provide the solution to their problems, but the Governments and people of many of the EU member states are extremely wary of admitting those states and further enlarging the EU. That in turn makes it difficult to convince the western Balkan six that it is worth their while implementing the kind of reforms that EU membership requires, which is creating further uncertainty and instability.

There is also a big elephant in the room: there is evidence that the malign influence of Russia is exploiting the situation. In a week in which a UK citizen was murdered as a result of exposure to a nerve agent produced by the Russian state, it is important to remember that the western Balkans are equally prey to acts of subterfuge. In 2016 Russia supported an attempted coup in Montenegro, and there is evidence to suggest that it recently supplied arms to groups intent on undermining the post-war Dayton peace settlement, which the UK, the US and others worked so hard to implement. As one witness told us, Russia’s particular skill is in making bad situations worse, and in the western Balkans there are many for them to exploit. The fact that Greece yesterday banned four Russian diplomats accused of tampering with the North Macedonian name ratification process highlights the risk that Russia will try to stop the agreement in its tracks. The Committee has therefore asked the Government to lay out what they are doing to help ensure that the two countries involved can make this decision freely and fairly for themselves, without malicious outside interference.

The UK has long championed peace in the western Balkans. UK troops helped to end the war in Bosnia in 1995, and with its NATO allies, the UK stepped in to stop the massacre of ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in 1999. We led the way in recognising Kosovan independence in 2008, and since 2014 the UK and Germany have spearheaded attempts to smooth relations between the different ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Many of the experts we took evidence from told us that, while the UK is in a bizarre position at the moment, with our Ministers encouraging the western Balkan six to join the EU just as our Government are in the process of preparing for the UK to leave, it still has a valuable role to play.

We are respected in the region as a security provider, as an exemplar of sound administration and good governance, and through UK trade, although it is minimal. The Committee welcomed the Government’s assurance...
that not only will the UK remain engaged in the western Balkans, but UK programme spending in the region and the number of diplomats deployed there will increase. Moreover, the Government told us that they will continue to support the western Balkan six in their path to EU membership for as long as they want it, and the Committee welcomes the Government’s assurances that UK support for the western Balkan six will not change. Nevertheless, the fact remains that our position in the region will change if we leave the EU, and we will no longer be involved in the EU’s negotiations with the western Balkans.

The Committee therefore calls on the Government to set out what they want to achieve in the western Balkans. While we will necessarily work in concert with our EU partners, the Committee believes it vital that we have a credible independent strategy for achieving our objectives in the region. The Committee also asks the Government to set out plans to increase trade.

The summit took place on Monday and Tuesday and was symbolically important. Unfortunately, however, it received little publicity, and the scale of the problems in the region did not receive the prominence and visibility in the media that it should have done. The Committee believes that we should continue to work for the future of the region, and we hope that the Government will commit to that in their response.

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for his statement and his Committee for its report. First, may I encourage the Committee to include maps in its reports for those of us who are more geographically challenged? Secondly, may I pick up on his comments about Russian influence? Given the Slavic connections between the western Balkans and the Russians, are Russia’s efforts a half-hearted attempt to gain influence in the former Yugoslavia, or a real push for domination in that part of the world?

Mike Gapes: Russia does have historical connections with this part of the world, but it is also important to recognise that we are talking about independent states that have the right to determine their own direction of travel. Russia wants to weaken the European Union and stop its enlargement. What Russia is trying to do—it tried to do this explicitly in Montenegro—is change the internal politics of some countries in order to stop their association with NATO and the EU, which is clearly not in our interests or in the interests of the region’s peoples or Governments, who have the right to make their own political choices.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I compliment my hon. Friend for his Committee’s report and his statement. He mentioned the irony that we are supporting the accession of the western Balkan states to the EU at a time when we are leaving it, and I am sure that he noticed the words of the Macedonian Foreign Minister who, when asked why that was the case, said:

“Perhaps those inside forget how cold it is outside.”

Even outside the EU, we will still have the close relationship that my hon. Friend talked about, particularly with Kosovo. We have a particular bond with Kosovo, and many Kosovans have settled in this country. Still only a

minority of countries in the world have recognised Kosovo as an independent state, so does my hon. Friend agree that Her Majesty’s Government should be doing more to ensure that Kosovo gets security recognition and is brought into the international fold and international institutions, such as the EU?

Mike Gapes: As I said in my statement, the British Government were among the first to recognise Kosovo as a state, which happened in 2008. The reality is that although more and more countries around the world have recognised Kosovo, there are some problems. Some EU countries have still not recognised it and that, combined with Russian weight and its veto within the United Nations system, has meant that Kosovo is not represented in all the international bodies that it should be. However, I am sure that the British Government will continue to give its support to Kosovo, just as we do at the moment.

Douglas Chapman (Dunfermline and West Fife) (SNP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for the Committee’s report. He mentioned our exit from the EU, so I wondered how he sees our ability to support long-term security in the western Balkans diminishing. What measures could be taken to help mitigate that loss of influence in this geopolitically important region? Separately, what steps should the Government be taking to give UK business the confidence to invest in and trade with the western Balkan nations?

Mike Gapes: The Government announced at the London summit that they would increase funding to the region to £80 million in 2020-21 and double the number of UK staff working in the region on security issues affecting the UK. I have already mentioned organised crime, and we are involved in the Balkans organised crime observatory, which is being launched jointly with the Austrian and Norwegian Governments to help civil society. We are also investing in cyber-security and digital skills. There are many practical ways of assisting, but we must also increase our economic footprint in the region, because UK trade with the area is limited. There are 17 million people in these six countries, so there is potential for us to do more.

Mr Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for presenting the report, the importance of which is highlighted by the more than 100,000 people who were killed at Srebrenica. That we continue to concentrate on the region is fundamentally important, and my hon. Friend outlined issues relating to rights, corruption, democracy and many other important topics. Through him, I want to ask the Minister about the continued role of the British Council, which does a phenomenal amount of work in the region. Additionally, what will our role be post Brexit in supporting security in the region?

Mike Gapes: We took evidence from the British Council. It is actively engaged in the western Balkans, and I am sure that that will continue. As for security, several countries in the region are already members of NATO, and the Republic of North Macedonia—I must get the name correct—received a positive response at the NATO summit, which is good news. British military personnel are already engaged—I met them myself in Tirana a few years ago—and taking part in training in the region, which I am told is particularly useful for some exercises.
There is a lot to be done, and there is good will towards the United Kingdom. I accept the point that withdrawing from the EU could put that at risk, but I am not going to restart that debate now because we had it earlier on. However, whether we are in the European Union or not, the UK must engage more than it currently is with the countries of the western Balkans.

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): May I put on the record the Government’s thanks to the Committee for its hard work in preparing the report following its inquiry into the western Balkans? I have listened to today’s exchanges with great interest. They are well timed, coming so soon after the successful western Balkans summit at the beginning of the week. At our summit, the meeting of Foreign Ministers, which I chaired, and the meeting of Interior Ministers, which the Home Secretary chaired, fed into the discussions of Heads of Government, which in turn were chaired by the Prime Minister. Those meetings led to the signature of three important joint declarations and the announcement of several important initiatives, all of which are available to Members.

I hope the House will join me in paying special thanks to His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales for his sustained involvement in reconciliation in the region and for hosting a wonderful reception on Tuesday evening to mark the conclusion of the summit.

I can reassure the Committee that I will pass on the comments of the hon. Member for Ilford South (Mike Gapes) and others to the Foreign Secretary, and the Foreign Office will of course respond to the report in due course, but at this stage I just want to single out one issue the hon. Gentleman raised, and that is the name issue. As we said at the summit, we offer our most heartfelt congratulations to and admiration for the leadership shown by the leaders of Greece and Macedonia in reaching an agreement, and we welcome the fact that leadership shown by the leaders of Greece and Macedonia at its summit this week NATO has announced it will help to seal the name change, for which a referendum is still required.

With those observations, I once again express my gratitude to the Committee for its work and undertake to give a more complete response in due course.

Mike Gapes: I just thank the Minister and all my colleagues for their contributions. We look forward to receiving the Government’s response.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I have to report an error in the announcement of the result of yesterday’s deferred Division, which was subject to a double majority vote under Standing Order No. 83Q. In respect of the Question relating to the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2018, the Ayes were 301 and the Noes were 211. In respect of the same Question, among those Members from qualifying constituencies in England and Wales, the Ayes were 284 and the Noes were 201, so the Ayes have it.

Points of Order

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier this morning, I raised a point of order in business questions, which the Leader of the House responded to. In her response, she suggested that in our earlier correspondence I had chosen to misunderstand what she had said in the Chamber on 21 June. I was very careful in my point of order this morning to report what she had said to me by way of explanation of her remarks to the House, and I want to place on the record that I had no intention of deliberately reporting to the House a misunderstanding of her remarks and that it was Traveller groups that asked me to raise the issue because of their concern about the language used in the Chamber on 21 June. I am grateful for the opportunity to place that on the record.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton): I thank the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. I understand that she also gave notice to the Leader of the House. Obviously, each of us is responsible individually for what we say in this place, and the principle of parliamentary free speech is very important, but that has to be exercised with care and sensitivity. The hon. Lady has clearly put her view on the record. I suggest we leave it at that.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Ind): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise for not having had a chance to give you notice of my point of order. During the urgent question this morning, I asked the Immigration Minister about the accuracy of previous remarks she had made in the House. In response, she said she had placed information in the House of Commons Library. The House of Commons Library tells me it has no such record of any correction. Can you advise me of what can be done in this circumstance?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has made clear the discrepancy he feels has taken place. I am sure that the Treasury Bench will have heard his comments and that the Minister, if she feels anything needs to be corrected, will do so. I am sure that the Treasury Bench will take that away.
Backbench Business

Forced Adoption in the UK

2.45 pm

Alison McGovern (Wirral South) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House recognises the pain and suffering that the historical practice of forced adoption caused many women and children; and calls on the Government to issue an apology to women and children affected by that practice.

This is a year of feminism. It is 100 years since the demands for women’s votes were finally heard in this place. What progress we have made in those 100 years! We should be in no doubt that the pace of progress is never constant, and in those 100 years women have needed to fight and fight again to see their rights respected. That is the true story of our past. There is a sadly long list of deeply shameful practices against women that were hidden and tolerated in the past and which colour the treatment of women today. While our past never determines our country’s next steps, it is always the backdrop for our future; the past always sets the scene. That is why historical injustices must be uncovered, understood and acknowledged. Honesty allows us to learn, honesty helps us to change and honesty gives people back the dignity of the truth about what happened to them.

The debate today covers one such practice. Most people in this place will be aware of the way in which young mums were treated in the past. Long before the last Labour Government were successful in their teenage pregnancy strategy to halve teenage pregnancy rates, or before we had the proactive strategies to help young mums that we do today, many young women who had become unexpectedly pregnant were hidden away and told that their child was to be adopted. They were told by representatives of the Church and state that it would be for the best; the aim was to maintain some idea of respectability. This process has long been shrouded in mystery. We know that several Churches were involved, including the Church of England and the Catholic Church, and that this process was not limited to the UK: it happened around the globe—Australia and Ireland have already acknowledged the role their Governments played.

Forgive me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I explain briefly how I came to think about this matter. The story involves two former Members of this House: Gordon Brown and Ann Keen. I had the honour of serving as Gordon’s last Parliamentary Private Secretary. One of the many benefits I have felt from that time has been the pleasure and honour of getting to know Ann Keen, who represented the people of Brentford and Isleworth between 1997 and 2010 and was Gordon’s PPS during his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Before she came to the House, Ann served our country as an NHS nurse, and she became one of our Health Ministers in government. I was also lucky to know Ann’s husband, Alan Keen, who represented Feltham and Heston in this place and who was a great friend to many here. I am very pleased that Ann is here today, along with others who experienced historical forced adoption.

Given the events surrounding the Hillsborough disaster, I have some understanding of historical injustices and how they burn. When, some time ago, Ann told me her story, I became very interested in how the historical practice of forced adoption could be brought to light and, what is more, how it came to happen at all.

Since that time, my constituent Sara, an adult whose mum was also treated in this way, has been in touch with me. Sara now runs a small charity that helps people to trace family members. She has explained to me how long-standing distress caused by the practices we will discuss today can cloud a person’s whole life. Sara has suggested to me that the Government might want to consider a small specialised service dedicated to the group affected. I will say more later, but the idea has merit.

It is estimated that about half a million British women were treated in this fashion, all of whom have families who are affected and all of whom must have been profoundly changed by the experience. I have come to see that Ann’s story is typical of many. Ann’s dad was a steelworker at Shotton, which is quite near my constituency, and the family were not at all wealthy. Ann became unexpectedly pregnant in 1966, when an older man with whom she worked forced himself upon her. Her family were horrified and the decision was taken that she would move away, where she would meet a local moral welfare worker—that is what social workers used to be called—and it was just assumed that the baby would be adopted. This moral welfare worker told Ann that the baby would cause her family hardship. She was told that, if she loved the baby, she would give it away. She was told it was for the best.

Ann ended up in what we think was a home run by the Swansea and Brecon moral welfare association. The home was draconian, and women were forced to clean and undertake menial tasks. From speaking to lots of others who have gone through this, I understand that that was very common. From the many stories of women who were treated just like Ann, there is one consistent impression: it seems obvious that those in positions of power with whom the women came into contact felt that the women ought to be punished. It is almost as if there was an unwritten policy that women ought to be treated badly. We owe it to that generation of women to ask ourselves who decided that they should be treated in that way. Why were the homes run like that? Whose policy was it?

A further crucial fact is that most of the people to whom I have spoken who have experienced forced adoption gave birth in the NHS. The national health service, which we rightly venerate, is part of this story. The midwives gave the impression to the mums that they knew the babies would be adopted. The women to whom I have spoken have a consistent history of treatment that was very common. From the many stories of women who were treated in this fashion, all of whom have families and who are affected and all of whom must have been deeply affected by the experience, I have come to see that that was very common. From the many stories of women who were treated just like Ann, there is one consistent impression: it seems obvious that those in positions of power with whom the women came into contact felt that the women ought to be punished. It is almost as if there was an unwritten policy that women ought to be treated badly. We owe it to that generation of women to ask ourselves who decided that they should be treated in that way. Why were the homes run like that? Whose policy was it?

A further crucial fact is that most of the people to whom I have spoken who have experienced forced adoption gave birth in the NHS. The national health service, which we rightly venerate, is part of this story. The midwives gave the impression to the mums that they knew the babies would be adopted. The women to whom I have spoken have a consistent history of treatment during labour, in that pain relief was withheld. If stitches were required after the birth, as they often are, it was done in the most uncomfortable way possible.

Ann, who later became a nurse, as I said, told me that in hospital she realised she was absolutely powerless. After the birth, mothers were often told, “Your baby is going to be adopted. Don’t get too attached.” Contact with the baby was controlled and restricted in many cases I have read about and, even by the standards of the time, these mothers were treated very differently from other women giving birth. These women were made to feel ashamed of their bodies and of their pregnancies, and that culture of shame was perpetrated by officialdom in one guise or another.
It is a complex history but I, for one, would like to know how it happened. Babies were adopted and, from the accounts I have read and listened to, it is hard to see that any meaningful consent was given. Many adoptive parents, who were dedicated and wonderful people, gave the babies loving homes, and mums were constantly told that it was simply for the best. But even where children were in loving homes, how could it be for the best if it was not really the mother’s decision? That cannot be right. These women seemed to be denied their most basic right, the right to hold their own opinion.

This is my question to the Minister: has anybody checked the historical records to discover what we know about how women were treated and why? Has anyone in government ever looked back over the records that are held about the NHS to find out what the process was for assisting young mums from moral welfare association homes? What is more, who paid for those homes and why? Much may not have been written down, but I find it hard to believe that nothing was written down and that there are no records.

From their accounts, it appears that many of these women were unable to make an informed decision about their pregnancy and adoption because they were told that their family would not get any state support for their child, yet Beveridge’s welfare state existed from 1948 onwards. By the 1960s, though imperfect, it was well developed. I have asked the House of Commons Library what the rules were for supporting children from 1948 onwards, and I am told that there were family benefits available, especially after the creation of child benefit in 1975. Even before that, there was family allowance, which was worth about £800 per year in today’s money in the late 1960s. That information seems to have been hidden from these young mums—why? Who decided that it would be?

We can never re-legislate the past—we can’t—but we must try to understand it. These policies were designed to make a so-called “problem” go away. Society had decided that something that is entirely natural was shameful. Women and children were hidden away to protect the fragile sensibilities of others, and it was a great injustice, and then that culture of shame and terror has made them keep quiet. For far too long, we have been told about this generation of mums, “She gave the baby up”, a phrase that undoubtedly implies consent, but that was never true. It has been a hurtful lie. Women were told that it would be for the best, and then the world was told that that was what they wanted.

Clearly, there has also been a huge impact on the generation of children who were adopted. As I have said, many of the adoptive families will have provided loving and brilliant homes, but the cultural story that these children were “given up for adoption” may well have meant that those adult children still live with the idea that they were not wanted by their birth parents, which in many cases was just not true at all. The long shadow of all this has huge implications for the mental health of the mothers, children and families that these policies affected. For some it has been utterly devastating, and has had the most significant consequences for their lives.

The Government today could assist in setting the story straight and helping people to understand what happened to them. That brings me to my final point—the need for an apology. As I have said several times, it is not for this House to legislate over the past, nor is it for us to decide that there ought to be one blanket approach for every family. Many will wish to simply turn a page in their history and move on, but for those living with desperate grief or furious anger there is a course of action that will help: in addition to looking for all government sources of information on this process and publishing them in an appropriate manner, the Prime Minister, on behalf of our nation, should apologise. Julia Gillard, the then Prime Minister of Australia, did so on behalf of her country in 2013 and Leo Varadkar did so on behalf of Ireland this year. There is no reason not to do it and every reason to do it.

As a woman who has experienced the culture of shame that stops women feeling proud and confident in their own skin, I would like to understand this history a little better. Women collectively live in the shadow of these events and hear from their teenage years that their body is something to be embarrassed about. Undoing that cultural attitude requires, for all of us, an acknowledgment of how wrong this course of action was. So here is my request to the Minister: let us collectively tell the truth; acknowledge that the history of women in this country is not just the heroism of the suffrage movement and the presence of a female Prime Minister, with zero struggles in between; show that the origin of the shame that stops young women standing up for themselves, even now, today, is these dark roots that we are talking about this afternoon; and bring those roots out into the open and say that it was wrong.

In summary, the Government could do three things; First, they could check all official records and documentation for evidence that related to this practice, and publish it. Secondly, they could work with organisations who support people who experienced the consequences of historical forced adoption and do something to help with tracing, counselling and emotional support. We are talking about a relatively discreet group of people and it would not be an investment from government that was needed forever, though it is very much needed now. Lastly, and most crucially, they can say sorry and apologise on behalf of the nation. Simply by doing so, the Prime Minister would make a great difference to all those who were told that the natural function of their body was a shameful thing. Simply by apologising, she would send a message to anyone unexpectedly pregnant today that they ought to expect help and support, and never approbation. Most of all, she would send a message to every woman in this country that our past, where women were blamed and robbed of their power, is finally the past.

2.59 pm

Stephen Twigg (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I thank and pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), who set out the case for this motion incredibly powerfully. Hers will be a tough speech for me to follow.

I thank the campaigners from the Movement for an Adoption Apology—known colloquially, as MAA—for their ongoing efforts, with others, to push this Government and previous Governments for many years on the important demand for an apology. In particular, I thank my step-mum, Jean Robertson-Molloy, who is present today. Jean is one of the founding members of the MAA campaign.
I join my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South in thanking our good friend and former colleague, Ann Keen, who is also present. The MAA campaigners have experienced first hand many of the issues that my hon. Friend set out so powerfully in her opening speech and have provided testimony that reflects the pain and suffering that they have experienced. I am also thinking today of the thousands of women and, indeed, their children who still find the situation too painful to discuss openly. As my hon. Friend set out, they all deserve an apology for the ordeal that they were put through.

As has already been said, forced adoption is not just part of our hidden past as a country, but part of the hidden pasts of many other countries around the world. Many women who suffered in Australia or Ireland have now had some form of inquiry or apology from their Government. In New Zealand, the new Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, is currently considering asking a New Zealand select committee to investigate how previous Governments in that country handled forced adoption, yet we still await any inquiry or apology here. We have an opportunity to learn from these close allies of the United Kingdom—Australia, New Zealand and Ireland—and, crucially, to develop a process that learns from what happened in those three countries and really engages with the voices and experiences of the women and children affected at the time.

At heart this is a human rights issue. Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 outlines “the right to respect for...family and private life”. In the case of forced adoptions, it is surely absolutely clear that the parents and children have been denied that most basic of human rights. If the Government accept that that is the case, surely we have a responsibility as a country and they have a responsibility as a Government to address the matter urgently.

As my hon. Friend said, five years ago the then Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, apologised on behalf of the Australian Government to people who had been affected by forced adoption or removal policies. A Senate inquiry, which had been the impetus for Julia Gillard’s apology, found that babies were taken illegally by doctors, nurses, social workers and religious figures and adopted by married couples. The mothers were often coerced—sometimes even drugged—and their children were taken away from them without their consent. Original birth certificates were then sealed away and a new one was issued that left no mention of the birth parents. This story is all too familiar to the women and girls in this country who were caught in similar circumstances from the 1950s onwards.

As my hon. Friend said, only last month the Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland, Leo Varadkar, recognised the issues surrounding the forced adoption of children in Ireland. He apologised to 126 people who had been adopted illegally between 1946 and 1969, saying the apology was part of “another chapter from the very dark history of our country”. His Government committed to an independent investigation to review the records of adoption services, which will almost certainly lead to the discovery that more births were illegally registered in Ireland.

Apologising for the actions of past Governments is not straightforward. The fact that both Ireland and Australia have been able to do so, and that they have not simply apologised but have held thorough and in-depth investigations, shows that it is possible to achieve some justice—delayed justice—for people who have been caught up in this scandal. I urge the Minister and the Prime Minister to follow the example of those close allies and devise a way to apologise. An apology is one aspect of justice. When I spoke to the campaigners, they made it very clear to me that they want not only an apology, but a process in which their voices are heard and in which their experiences are taken into full account. Their voices are, of course, those that we need to listen to.

I want to spend a moment or two now recalling the testimony of some of them. Helen Jeffreys gave birth to a son in Leeds in 1965. When her son was two months old, her social worker refused them any more help and said that they had to leave the mother and baby home in which they were staying. Eventually, Helen had to give up her son for adoption. At the time, this meant that she would never get to see him again, as the legislation that is now in place to request a birth certificate on an 18th birthday did not exist at that time. Helen said: “I was 18 and a perfectly competent mother. I wanted to keep him.”

Sadly, as we have heard from my hon. Friend and as I am sure we will hear from other accounts during the debate this afternoon, Helen was coerced into giving her son up for adoption.

Although much of the testimony that I have read and have heard about at first hand does involve children being forcibly removed from their parents, this scandal forces us to engage with some of the wider social attitudes that prevailed in the 1950s and the 1960s. Young, single mothers were often ostracised from their communities and their families simply because of their pregnancies. They might have been referred to as “trouble makers”, “deviants”, or morally or mentally at fault. In a society where that narrative was widely shared by families, by communities, by Churches and by the Government and Parliament at the time, it was no wonder that many women felt pressured and that they had no other choice but to give up their children.

Lorna gave birth to a girl in 1969. Her boyfriend had thrown her out of the house while she was pregnant and she had ended up squatting in London. As with many women at the time, her family were strict, so she did not feel that she had the option to go back to the family home. She was placed in the care of a religious social worker who forced her to read the Bible regularly simply to account for the dreadful sin of being a single mother-to-be. The Church told her, with no empathy and no compassion, that she had no choice but to give up her daughter for adoption. A few months after the baby was born, Lorna gave her up for adoption and they did not see each other for another 36 years.

Those are just two examples. There are hundreds of Helens and Lornas who have been caught up in this national scandal. They have been waiting patiently for years—in fact, for decades—for some kind of explanation why they were forced to give up their children and for some kind of justice. Lorna says: “Although an apology cannot heal the pain of separation that thousands of women like myself have had to deal with, I would like to hear someone in authority say that simple word ‘Sorry’. We have a right to it.”
These women, these mothers, absolutely have the right to an apology. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for giving us this opportunity today to amplify support in this Chamber for that call. In her 2013 apology, Julia Gillard said: “As a nation, we’ve got to be prepared to look in an unflinching way at our past and when we see a wrong, we have got to be prepared to recognise it, name it and act to redress it.” This is surely something from which all Governments can learn. I hope that it is something that this Government will take note of and act on. The women caught up in this scandal have been trying for too long to achieve justice. Now, the Government have an opportunity to act.

3.9 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Today is the first anniversary of my maiden speech and this is my 100th contribution in this place. Giving a voice to the voiceless is a central cause that my Labour colleagues and I seek to deliver. Speaking in this debate is a most apt way for me to pursue my purpose in Parliament. I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for their touching contributions and for securing this important debate. As a member of the Backbench Business Committee, I was delighted to support the allocation of the debate.

I would like to share directly the story of a woman from my home city of Leeds, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby. Helen Jeffreys was 17 when she gave birth to her baby son, with no support available, no access to advice and certainly no access to any housing or social benefits. Her son was forcibly taken from Helen and placed for adoption. She said: “We weren’t given a choice—no offer of support at all, I held out until the last possible moment and it was obvious to everyone that I wanted to keep him but he was quite literally dragged out of my arms.”

Helen’s son was born in Leeds, but placed by the Church of England adoption society in York. He was allowed no contact with his birth mother or father. In a world without fertility treatment, there were many would-be parents desperate to adopt children. As Helen puts it, the culture was “to get the mothers out of the way as quickly as possible.” Her son was given no information about his birth mother and father. When Helen requested his adoption file years later, she found a one-page document with many factual inaccuracies. The paper, for example, noted the occupation of the birth mother and father as “art students”, when they were not art students.

Since then, Helen has been reunited with the son she lost many years ago, but we must remember that this is not the end of the story. Television programmes can lead us to believe that a reunion is equivalent to the happy ending. However, the adoption seriously affected her life and that of her daughter, who felt the loss that remains with them throughout their lives and guilt about giving up their child to an unknown future because they are unable to look after their baby. Thankfully, there are support agencies and charities that people can turn to for advice about parenting and adoption. We are also fortunate enough to live in a country where raising a child as a single parent is not taboo and is generally accepted by society. Unfortunately, this was not always the case.

In post-world war two society, there was a moral backlash against women who were pregnant, with some women being thrown out of their parents’ homes for bringing so-called shame and disgrace on them. Social workers and others in authority were not necessarily helpful in counteracting those attitudes, and adoption was pushed on young pregnant women as the only sensible option for them. Pregnant women were then sent to mother and baby homes run by religious or state organisations that made the pain and suffering worse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) so eloquently described, this is where the suffering took place and where the forced adoption happened. They were not advised about things like the National Assistance Act 1948, which was introduced by the Government to help those who were destitute and thus could have helped them. Nor were they advised of any other benefits they could have sought to help them to find a way through the difficult situation they were in.

One such woman was my constituent, Jean Robertson-Molloy, who is present here today and was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg). Jean reluctantly had to give up her baby in the 1950s, having been pressured to do so, and her daughter was sent to be adopted in New Zealand. Jean spent years of anguish and guilt wondering what had happened to her daughter and what sort of a person she was developing into. It is hard to know whether this is what inspired Jean to become a social worker, but she dedicated her life to helping others. She was eventually reunited with her daughter, so that story had a happy ending. However, the adoption seriously affected her life and that of her daughter, who felt the same as many children who have been adopted, wondering why they were given up for adoption and why they were rejected.

Jean, realising that her experience was not unique, decided to help found a group called the Movement for an Adoption Apology. This movement has been actively campaigning for an apology and an acknowledgment and an apology from the Government in recognition of the fact that the state turned a blind eye to the false adoption scandal, causing a great deal of
distress and mental anguish to those affected. On 21 March 2013, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard gave a full apology, on behalf of the Australian Government, for false adoption. Leo Varadkar, the Taoiseach of Ireland has also given such an apology recently. The Movement for an Adoption Apology is asking the Government to do the same. The harm done over the years by forced adoption cannot be undone by an apology, but an apology would go a long way to comforting those affected. Will the Minister therefore ask the Prime Minister please to make such an apology to the mothers and children affected by false adoption, to tell the full story of the false adoption practice that happened all those decades ago but is still very much an issue for those affected and to provide the support that is so desperately needed, still to this day, by everyone who has been affected by this scandal?

3.17 pm

John Mc Nally (Falkirk) (SNP): The narrative we have heard today, particularly from the hon. Member for Wirral South (Alison McGovern), has expressed all the concerns and high emotions involved in this awful, unjust practice. We have enormous sympathy for mothers who went through this. It is right that our social attitudes have moved on and we now have robust safeguards in place with regard to adoption. I thank the hon. Lady for securing this debate.

These mothers were, as we have heard, forced to make extremely upsetting choices simply because of the prevailing moral standard of the time. I know that Scottish Ministers have a great deal of sympathy for those women, whose accumulated experiences clearly show them to be the victims of the prevailing moral and social behaviour of the time. Nowadays, it is only right and just that we have more robust safeguards in place when mothers and other people consider adoption.

It is widely accepted that in the years after world war two until the 1970s, many single mothers were reluctant to part with their babies but, in reality, they were faced with little choice. Public opinion and private moral standards at the time placed enormous pressure on single mothers, making it impossible for many to retain care of their babies. Since the 1970s, there have been major shifts in the way we see the family, single mothers, and the rearing of children. Our society has rightly moved on, and we know that there is nothing wrong with single or unmarried women bringing up children.

The Scottish Government provide funding to Birthlink, which, in turn, provides services to individuals and families separated by adoption. This includes maintaining the adoption contract register for Scotland, whereby the agency helps children, parents and relatives who have been affected by adoption, either by looking for somebody, getting information, or just providing someone to talk to. The notable Scottish author Irvine Welsh is the patron of Birthlink, and he summed up its great work when he said:

“Birthlink is an organisation which brings people together, when often create circumstances has parted them. Ultimately, all we have in life is each other, so I’m proud and honoured to be a patron of this wonderful charity.”

I echo his sentiments.
continue to be unable to do so. The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration in the granting of an adoption order. Contested adoptions do not affect discussions about possible information exchange and the support offered to birth parents. However, as birth parents are likely to reject discussions about potential adopters and meeting them and be resistant to adoption plans, they will be unlikely to accept any offers of support available.

To conclude, it is so important to provide lots of TLC and understanding to mothers at this extremely difficult time. We all appreciate the work that Birthlink and other organisations provide to mothers and families at this most sensitive time. We agree that the Government should issue an apology to women and children affected by this practice, and we support the Movement for an Adoption Apology.

3.24 pm

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) for securing today’s debate, and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it. I also thank the Movement for an Adoption Apology for its tireless campaigning work.

The pain and suffering that the historical practice of forced adoption caused has largely been expunged from the history books and has received limited attention, yet the physical and emotional scars left behind are very real, very current and have an enduring daily impact on the women, children and families involved. Their suffering is made more painful by the fact that, as each day passes and no formal inquiries of any shape take place, the full truth may never be known. They may never be able to reunite with their children or share with them their story. Worse still, many adopted adults do not seek out their birth parents, as they and their adopters are under the false impression that they were freely, not forcibly, adopted.

At the heart of today’s debate are harrowing human stories, such as those we have heard from my hon. Friends the Members for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), about thousands of women and the babies that were taken from them after intensive coercion, at times force, and deceit carried out by the very institutions of the state that were supposed to help and support them. There were no choices. Ann Keen, our friend and former colleague—her story was told characteristically eloquently and passionately by my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South—very clearly showed that this was not about choices.

This was a cultural attitude fostered by institutions and parts of the state that, instead of acting in the best interests of women and their babies, did the exact opposite. Culturally, the 1950s, ’60s and early ’70s, when the majority of these forced adoptions took place, was a very different time. That point was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, West Derby. Today, adoption orders are largely made as a last resort to keep children safe from harm, but in the post-war years, many women who were pregnant out of wedlock were chastised and deemed unfit for motherhood. Birth control was less reliable, while the contraceptive pill was available to women only from 1967, and even then only to those who were married. Welfare benefits were not as easily accessible, and sex education was non-existent. It was also a time when people held institutions of the state—teachers, welfare and social workers, benefits advisers, NHS staff, the Church and GPs—in much higher regard than they do now. Particularly in working-class communities, anyone who held such a role was respected and listened to by the community, and their advice was acted on, even when the advice was wrong.

This debate has only been made possible by women coming forward and sharing their painful stories. It is my honour, although with a heavy heart, to share a few of them today. Diana Defries, initially out of abject fear, concealed her pregnancy. When she eventually saw her GP, she was shipped off miles away from her home in London to a strict mother and baby home in Southampton. She was made to undertake physical work until she was admitted to hospital to give birth. In the hospital, she was treated like she did not matter. She was separated from her baby, given Valium daily—she refused to take it—and injected with a drug, which is not recommended now, to stop her lactating. After 15 days with her baby, she was taken on a train to Waterloo station. When she arrived, she was taken to the Crusade of Rescue Offices in Ladbroke Grove, and her baby was forcibly taken from her.

Diana was 16 years old when she gave birth to her daughter, Stephanie. She had not long turned 17 when Stephanie was taken from her in October 1974. She received no post-natal care, and she was lied to by social services. She was told she had no other options, and that adoption was the best option. She was told she was too young to receive any help, and a week later she was sent back to school and sworn to secrecy. She has not had any more children, but, thankfully, she is reunited with her daughter. In her words, they have “had to navigate a lot of challenges”, and she rightly states that any apology should be for both of them. Attachment is a two-way process: children separated from their birth mothers will, to varying degrees, feel a sense of trauma and loss, no matter how young they are or how long they have spent in their mum’s care.

In 1964 Veronica Smith was 24 years old. She was sent to a private maternity hospital and isolated from everyone she knew, right at the time when she needed them more than ever. She was with her baby for one week until an advert was placed in a local paper, and her baby was fostered and then adopted by strangers. Veronica’s story, like so many others we have heard today, is a story of powerlessness, and of things being done to women, not with them, on the false assertion that they and their babies would be better off that way, and that if they really loved their babies, they would not resist adoption.

Another woman told me that she was raped behind a local pub by her then boyfriend’s brother. Her baby was placed into foster care and adopted at four months old. She described to me her treatment by officials as being characterised by submission and deep shame, but the only shame here should be firmly on the shoulders of those who harmed her and the state institutions that failed her and her baby.

Others have told me of being abused when they were sent away, or being ostracised and subjected to degrading and vicious verbal abuse from professionals. The common
thread running through all those stories is one of lies, control, coercion, force, abuse and cruelty, which has led to a lifetime of mental health difficulties, physical harm and emotional distress. For someone not to know where their child is, or whether that child knows that they were forced into giving them up, is a deep and pervasive pain.

Today we are asking for a simple and straightforward act by the Government: an apology to the women, children and families for their enduring pain and undue suffering. As Diana said, such an apology would “allow us to show the lifelong impact of unexpressed grief for unacknowledged loss.”

In his response, I would like the Minister to explain briefly his Government’s grounds for rejecting a public inquiry, and say whether he is considering other ways of shedding light on these travesties, such as conducting an initial scoping exercise in his Department, or appointing a small team to review the issues raised today. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral South suggested, he could set up some support groups and make documents available. The Minister does have options available, and I say politely to him that he should use them.

We now live in different times, and although the likelihood of what happened to Ann, Diana, Veronica and thousands more women happening today has diminished, their pain endures every moment of every day. The very least they deserve is an apology, and I sincerely hope that the Minister will confirm that they will get one.

3.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I commend the hon. Members for Wirral South (Alison McGovern) and for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on securing this important debate. No one can fail to be moved by the plight of the young mothers and their children whose lives have been blighted by the unacceptable practices of the past, and it is only right that this House acknowledges their unnecessary pain and suffering.

Many of my colleagues have spoken movingly about their constituents. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) spoke about Helen, and the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous) spoke about Jean Robertson-Molloy, who happens to be the step-mum of the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby. The hon. Member for Wirral South spoke emotionally and movingly about our former colleague, Ann Keen, and about Helen Jeffreys, and the hon. Member for Falkirk (John Mc Nally) outlined the excellent work done by Birthlink.

I wish to add my voice to those of my colleagues, and express my deepest sympathy to all those affected. These women were let down, in many cases by their families who would not support them, but also by professionals and organisations in the sector who allowed society’s moral attitude towards unmarried mothers at that time to influence their practice. As Members have described so eloquently in bringing to life those tragic stories, women were put under enormous pressure, and often faced the stark choice of returning home without their babies or fending for themselves. The devastating consequences for these mothers, and for their sons and daughters, are clear to see. Mothers talk of their feelings of loss, guilt and shame, of their unbearable grief for a lost relationship, and of not knowing whether their child is still alive. We know that many children have suffered too, with overwhelming feelings of rejection, struggling with their identity and difficulties in bonding and forming attachments.

The hon. Member for Wirral South spoke movingly about the experiences of her constituent Sara and Sara’s mother, and the impact on their lives. It is truly shocking to hear how single mothers were treated at that time in our country. Adoptions during that period were generally handled through agencies run by the Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church and the Salvation Army—they have quite rightly apologised for their involvement in past poor practice.

It is important to recognise and accept that the legislation at the time was not robust enough to prevent what happened. I deeply regret that that was the case. Successive Governments have since taken action to strengthen the legislative framework so that it cannot happen again.

The hon. Member for Wirral South rightly said that it is important to understand what happened in the past and who was responsible. These issues were looked at closely by the Houghton committee in 1972, which covered the key issues of who arranged adoptions and the problems that brought, evidence about mothers being unable to give proper consent to relinquish their babies, and the lack of access to birth records to allow tracing later in life. It also covered the issue the hon. Lady raised about the role of the NHS and private nursing homes and reported that the British Medical Association had called for changes to how adoptions were made. I think it is unlikely that further research will bring new information. Evidence provided from birth parents suggests that record keeping during the time was poor, absent and often inaccurate.

Alison McGovern: The Minister is making a really worthwhile speech. He just mentioned a report. I think of a committee of this House. Will he be so good as to ensure that the report is made publicly available? He might ask the Library to do that, because it is very important to point to the work that has already been done. It sounds as though it was done a long time ago, so that is something we will want to discuss as we go forward.

Nadhim Zahawi: I thank the hon. Lady for that point, and I will certainly endeavour to do so.

Let me move on to why lessons have been learned from the past. We are confident that what happened to these mothers and their children could not be repeated today. Society now takes a very different attitude to single mothers. The legislative framework has been transformed beyond recognition. Today, the key principle is that children are generally best looked after within their family, with their parents playing a full part in their lives. Single mothers are given the support they need so that they can remain as a family. That is as it should be, as I am sure we all agree.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Can the Minister clarify that the report he has referred to was produced in 1972?

Nadhim Zahawi: Yes—I did say that when I referred to it.
Children can only be removed permanently by a court without the consent of the parents if the court is satisfied that the child is suffering significant harm or is likely to suffer significant harm if they remain with their birth family. Courts must consider all the evidence put before them, including evidence from the parents themselves, who will have legal representation. Adoption agencies and fostering services are now inspected by Ofsted, whose role is to ensure that practice is in line with the legal framework.

For the mothers who are at the heart of this debate, it is essential that they are able to trace their children and that their children can establish their parentage. The hon. Member for Wirral South called on the Government to work with organisations that support people who experienced the consequences of historical forced adoption to create a small service that will help with tracing family and support. Those affected by past adoption practices can already access intermediary services to help them to trace their birth children or birth parents and establish whether contact is possible.

Intermediary services are provided by registered adoption agencies, including local authorities, voluntary adoption agencies and registered adoption support agencies. When an intermediary agency finds a person, contact can be arranged if both parties agree. Birth relatives and adopted adults can also add their details to the adoption contact register at the General Register Office to find a birth relative or an adopted person. There is support for birth parents and adult adoptees who have suffered with mental anguish and illness. In addition to the NHS mental health services available for those with conditions such as stress and depression, a number of voluntary adoption agencies and adoption support agencies offer specialist birth family counselling, often under contract to local authorities.

I should like to thank again the hon. Members for Wirral South and for Liverpool, West Derby for today’s debate. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), asked specifically about a public inquiry. None of us disputes that these women were victims of poor adoption practice all those years ago, but I believe that it is unlikely that a public inquiry would uncover new facts. We believe that the lessons of the time have been learned and led to significant change both to legislation and practice now. No child is removed from their birth family unless they have suffered significant harm or are at risk of such harm, and of course, parents have legal representatives.

Stephen Twigg: The Minister referred to a 1972 inquiry. Does he recognise that a lot of the mothers who have now spoken openly would not have done so at that time, and I imagine would therefore not have had an opportunity to have their voices heard in that inquiry? That is the case for some kind of process, be it a public inquiry or some other process leading to an apology now.

Nadhim Zahawi: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I do take it on board. I am very happy to meet one or both hon. Members—the hon. Gentleman or the hon. Member for Wirral South—and if they bring the mothers with them, I can hear directly from them as well.

I hope that all those affected can take some comfort in the knowledge that what happened to them is so public and is on public record for all to see and understand. This House rightly acknowledges that this appalling historical practice has left a legacy of hurt and pain. I hope that where possible, many a mother and a child can be reunited and be given the comfort of building a family relationship.

3.43 pm

Alison McGovern: It has been my pleasure and honour to lead on this debate. I thank the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck), who gave an excellent speech, as well as the Minister, who has listened carefully. I will make a couple of brief remarks on what he has just said. His offer to meet us was very welcome and will be taken up. We might then talk in some detail privately about the reasons why local authority services might not always be able to meet the need that there certainly is, and a little more about why it is crucial that the Government consider a public apology, delivered by the Prime Minister. I will look forward to speaking directly with the Minister on that point.

I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), for Leeds North West (Alex Sobel) and for Enfield, Southgate (Bambos Charalambous), who all participated in an eloquent way. Most of all, I thank the women who are the reason we are here today. I am glad that we have opened the door to their stories, which are now on record. They have been through an awful lot just to get to the House today. I hope that the House’s affirmation for the motion will lead to a broader acknowledgement of our history, of past practices, and of why those practices were so very wrong.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House recognises the pain and suffering that the historical practice of forced adoption caused many women and children; and calls on the Government to issue an apology to women and children affected by that practice.
Carillion


3.45 pm

Rachel Reeves (Leeds West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered lessons from the collapse of Carillion.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for scheduling the debate for today, which is timely. This Sunday it will be six months since Carillion entered liquidation. When it collapsed, it employed 42,000 people, more than 19,000 of them working in the United Kingdom. It held liabilities of £7 billion, including a £2 billion liability to 30,000 suppliers and subcontractors, and it held just £29 million in cash to meet those liabilities. In the past six months, nearly 2,500 Carillion workers have been made redundant and more than 1,000 have voluntarily left what remains of the business. Projects have been mothballed and suppliers have faced ruin.

Since the collapse of Carillion, five Committees have looked into the issues surrounding its collapse. Along with the Work and Pensions Committee, my Committee—the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—has considered the causes of the collapse. The debate is also timely because this morning our Committees published a special joint report containing 24 responses to our original report. It gave those criticised in the report, and those with a significant interest, a chance to respond ahead of the Government’s formal response to our findings. In the time that I have this afternoon, I shall set out what my Committee found, and what needs to change. I thank fellow members of the Joint Committee, some of whom are in the Chamber today, for their work to uncover the lessons from Carillion.

When it collapsed, Carillion had been in existence for 19 years. It was the second largest construction company in the UK, having grown through large and frequent acquisitions and Government outsourcing. Carillion’s directors, and those who know the construction industry, told us that it was a low-margin industry, and part of a highly competitive market with inherent risks. Businesses do collapse every day, and the process of business creation and failure is part of any well-functioning modern economy, but warning lights should have been flashing when such a big business was on the brink. We should demand the highest standards of corporate governance to help to ensure that British businesses are well run, but that did not happen with Carillion.

Despite its catastrophic failure, the Carillion directors, when they sat in front of our Committee, continually claimed that the business was sound, even after it had gone into liquidation, and that only a handful of contracts had brought it down. They even said that everything was fine until just a few months before the collapse. As late as the day before Carillion went into liquidation, the directors thought that they could avert the collapse. They seemed to have a sense of entitlement, and a belief that the Government would step in and bail out their failed business. In their evidence to us, they blamed everyone but themselves. They blamed the Bank of England, the Canadian construction market, Carillion’s suppliers, and professional designers of concrete beams.

However, the collapse of Carillion has meant that our Committees have been able to see the board papers and minutes from company meetings, many of which we have published. Looking inside the company, we have seen a business that acquired other businesses, and relied on unrecoverable “goodwill” to prop up its balance sheet; a company that kept increasing senior salaries and bonuses, and ensured that a dividend was paid regardless of its own health; a company that was paying suppliers late, and bidding for contracts that it could not afford to deliver on time or on budget.

Carillion’s largest acquisitions—of companies such as Mowlem, Alfred McAlpine and Eaga—allowed it to put “goodwill” on its balance sheet. Those notional values of each acquisition, totalling almost £1.5 billion, were allowed to sit on the balance sheet for year after year, without any link to reality and the real value. When the company collapsed, the goodwill was wiped out, too, showing its true value—a value of zero. Carillion’s board needed healthy balance sheets to continue its dividend policy of increasing its payout to shareholders, but the truth is that it paid those dividends regardless of whether it had the cash flow required for them. Right up to the spring of 2017, it was promoting its growing payout with little challenge—no challenge—from directors as to whether the money might have been better spent supporting the pension fund, for example, or any part of the failing business.

Despite the growing pensions deficit, there is one area where directors felt able to spend money, and that was on growing salaries for the leaders of the business. Its remuneration committee increased payouts on the failing business. A responsible business would pay out with little challenge—no challenge—from directors up to the spring of 2017, it was promoting its growing dividend policy of increasing its payout to shareholders, but the truth is that it paid those dividends regardless of whether the company collapsed, the good will was wiped out, too, showing its true value—a value of zero. Carillon’s board needed healthy balance sheets to continue its dividend policy of increasing its payout to shareholders, but the truth is that it paid those dividends regardless of whether it had the cash flow required for them. Right up to the spring of 2017, it was promoting its growing payout with little challenge—no challenge—from directors as to whether the money might have been better spent supporting the pension fund, for example, or any part of the failing business.

Despite the growing pensions deficit, there is one area where directors felt able to spend money, and that was on growing salaries for the leaders of the business. Its remuneration committee increased payouts on the failing business. A responsible business would see payment by results, not payment by averages.

When Carillion’s directors needed to prop up their balance sheets, they did so by putting pressure on the suppliers. Carillion was, ironically, a signatory to the Government’s prompt payment code, promising suppliers they would be paid within 60 days. When the code was launched in 2013, Carillion was already known to Government as being poor payers, but the National Audit Office report into the company showed that in signing it up to support the policy the Government seemed to turn a blind-eye to Carillion’s failure to meet its duties to suppliers.

We heard on our Committee from the Federation of Small Businesses that some businesses were waiting more than 120 days for payment and Carillion had become notorious as late payers. Carillion managed to use this to its advantage, arranging an early payment facility with the banks, meaning suppliers could receive payments earlier than Carillion’s 120-day terms but
they would have to face a cut in what they were owed in order to do so. Carillion was effectively borrowing from its suppliers, propping up its balance sheets again without a care for the state of the balance sheets of the thousands of businesses relying on it and doing its work.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con) rose—

Rachel Reeves: I give way to my fellow Committee member.

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Lady is making a powerful case for what we found in the inquiry. As evidence of this house of cards that she is describing, which it undoubtedly was, Richard Adam, the former finance director, told the inquiry that not only did he sell all his shares when he left the business, but he would not be prepared to put his own money at risk by being a shareholder.

Rachel Reeves: I absolutely agree. The directors of the business were not invested in the business. They were not part of the pension fund that collapsed and, as the hon. Gentleman said, Richard Adam, the finance director who oversaw the accounting practices that helped to contribute to the collapse of the company, sold his shares as soon as he could because he knew what we all now know: this business was a failing business that would not be around for much longer.

What we found in Carillion was a board focused on short-term fixes and growing payouts, with no plan for what would happen when the illusion was shattered. Looking at the poor treatment of suppliers when the company was solvent and the trail of destruction the management of the company has caused, I cannot see how Carillion’s directors can make any claim that they had anything other than their own personal interests at heart. In the latest responses that we have published today, Carillion’s directors continue to refuse to demonstrate any culpability for the state the company was in. They have denied that our report is accurate, but have given no evidence whatsoever to support their case.

Let me be clear: the directors of Carillion are culpable for the company’s collapse. They should be ashamed of their performance and they should not be allowed to take the helm of a company ever again.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): My hon. Friend is making a first-class speech. Does this not bring to mind the quotation from John Maynard Keynes that capitalism rewards bad behaviour?

Rachel Reeves: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. Bad behaviour was being rewarded at Carillion, but the people being rewarded were not the people investing in the business, or the people working for it and saving for their pensions with the business; the people being rewarded were those making the decisions about where the money went—making the decisions about whether to plug the pensions deficit or pay dividends to shareholders. Those are the people who should be paying the price, but under the system we have today, they walk away with their bonuses and their dividends intact. It is other people—the people who are not responsible and did not make the decisions but who did the work—who are paying the price, and that is what needs to be reformed.

When corporate governance is failing, there should be checks and balances, but our inquiry found a regime that was not up to the job of doing that. The first line of defence should have been those who were auditing and advising the company. KPMG, Carillion’s auditors for 19 years, continued to give a clean bill of health to the business, even just a few months before the July 2017 announcements that heralded its swift but painful decline. In the report we have published today, KPMG’s chairman, Bill Michael, denies any issues with the clean bill of health that his company gave to Carillion just months before it began to publicly collapse. Mr Michael is burying his head in the sand, which reflects sadly on his understanding of the impact of Carillion on the reputation of his company, and of the future of audit as an industry. The status quo is simply not sustainable, and the big audit firms must understand that and respond to it.

Competition in industry is supposed to drive up quality and bring down costs. It is not working in the audit market, where a cosy club of four hoop up huge fees before, during and after any corporate failure, yet their audits and accounts, as one investor put it to our Committee, read like a mystery novel—a fiction, with the reader searching for scant clues on what is really happening. The big four firms audit all the FTSE 100 businesses and all but a handful of the FTSE 350 top businesses, as well as providing them with advice on a range of services. There are conflicts of interest at every turn, and it was left to the least conflicted, PwC, to clear up the mess during the liquidation process.

Kelvin Hopkins: My hon. Friend is making an important point about the audit companies. Is it not a major problem that they are ostensibly there to represent the shareholders’ interests against those of the managers but that they are actually employed by the managers, and that if they do not give the managers what they want, they will not get the next contract?

Rachel Reeves: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The people who rely on audit are the shareholders, and also the small businesses that supply the company, the people who work there and the pensioners who have saved for their pensions with that business. But they are not the people who employ the auditor, and they are not the people the auditors are accountable to. The auditor is accountable to the audit committee of the business, and it is often appointed by that committee on the advice of the chief financial officer. So, as my hon. Friend says, the incentives are all wrong.

I am pleased to see that our report has prompted some long-overdue soul searching in parts of the audit profession. While the written reactions of the big four accountancy firms to our report differed, they all seem to recognise that there were issues to be addressed. The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales has recognised this as a watershed moment, and it is leading a review of the audit profession. I hope that that review will propose some radical solutions. We have now referred the audit market for investigation by the Competition and Markets Authority. The new chair of the CMA, Lord Tyrie, was endorsed in his role by the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, and he should now demonstrate the same determination he showed in this place leading the Parliamentary
Commission on Banking Standards when he looks at the future of the audit market. I am convinced that we have to find a way of making the audit market more competitive and audits themselves more trusted, and of ending the conflicts of interest that can damage the reputation of some of our economy’s major firms.

Behind the company and its auditors and advisers, there are statutory regulators who should have been expected to step in when the business and the audits were seen to be failing. Carillion’s finance directors and auditors were subject to scrutiny by the Financial Reporting Council. Now that the company has collapsed, two former CFOs are under investigation for the preparation of financial statements, and Carillion’s auditors are subject to further scrutiny. During our inquiry, we heard that the FRC had already taken an interest in the situation at Carillion, and that it had concerns about the quality of previous audits by KPMG. However, the regulator had been far too passive. It accepted extra disclosures being made by KPMG and Carillion the following year without any further follow-up action and, although it found repeat issues with KPMG’s wider audit work across other companies, it seemingly took no firm action there either.

Carillion’s huge pension debt was a matter of concern to its pension trustees and the Pensions Regulator, the other regulator involved, but the regulator’s response, again, was feeble. It threatened to impose a contributions schedule and then left the power unused. It sought to negotiate a payment agreement and then agreed precisely with what the company wanted. It launched action only once the company collapsed and then it was too late. Again and again, the Pensions Regulator barked but did not bite. While plugging the £2.6 billion hole in the pension fund would not have saved the company, it could have reduced the largest ever burden on the Pension Protection Fund, which will see pension holders receive less than they have been promised by their company’s scheme. It is telling that none of Carillion’s directors was in the collapsed scheme.

The Committees found serious concerns about the performance of both regulators, including their powers, remit and leadership. If regulators are not working well, employees, investors, suppliers and customers can have little confidence in the businesses in which they are invested. Statutory regulators need to be doing more. Across the work of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, we rarely find ourselves criticising regulators for being too bold. Instead, we keep hearing timid bodies apologising for letting consumers down. That needs to change, and the change should be led from the top.

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): The hon. Lady is making an excellent speech so far. Does she agree that one of the Committee’s concerns was that the companies that were being taken over all had sick pension schemes and that the Pensions Regulator should have been asking serious questions at that point?

Rachel Reeves: The hon. Gentleman, who sits on the Work and Pensions Committee, is absolutely right. When Carillion took over companies such as Mowlem, McAlpine and Eaga, it was taking on businesses, yes, but it was also taking on huge pension deficits, which contributed to the problems. However, the business could have decided to address that pension deficit. It was not that nothing could be done. It could have decided to pay money into the pension fund instead of paying out to shareholders and to directors in the form of bonuses, but it decided to do the exact opposite. It made the wrong choices and prioritised the wrong people. It prioritised itself.

The announcement of the Kingman review into the FRC is a welcome start, but the Government must confirm that they are willing to see radical change, including giving regulators more powers if needed and holding them better to account for not using the powers they already have.

The Government, the audit profession and the regulators need to take urgent action. They owe it to the tens of thousands of people affected by Carillion’s collapse and to the untold number of people who could be affected if this is ever allowed to happen again. There are some clear lessons. In contracts, best value is not the same as the lowest price. Outsourcing is not always better than doing things in-house. Privatisation does not mean that the risk or the cost of failure when things go catastrophically wrong are contracted out.

We would all like to think that this is a case of one horrendously badly run company—Carillion was horrendously badly run—but with Interserve, Capita and Mitie all facing difficulties, we would have to be pretty brave to conclude that this is a one-off. We need to restore integrity to British business and the firms that audit them. Six months on, we have regulators reviewing and reviews of the regulators, but we need firmer action on corporate governance, on breaking up cosy cartels and on toughening up sanctions for misconduct. To secure our public services, for jobs, for small business, for contractors and for pensioners, that action is needed and it is needed now.

4.4 pm

Sir Bernard Jenkin (Harwich and North Essex) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). I commend her and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field) for their joint inquiry, which has shed a great deal of light on the situation. It was obvious when Carillion collapsed earlier this year that there was more than just one issue with the company. In general, companies do not go under for simple reasons, and there is no doubt that Carillion was mismanaged. The firm was paying ever increasing dividends, eventually reaching an annual figure of £80 million, while experiencing declining financial performance and an ever more rickety balance sheet. It took some time for that situation to arise.

The reason for Carillion’s importance to the Government and the intense public interest is that its failure was not just due to the spectacular nature of its bankruptcy; before its collapse, Carillion built hospitals, maintained schools, constructed bridges and roads and electrified railways. When it failed, it had approximately 420 public services via private contractors and providers. That was reflected in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster’s recent speech at Reform.
The Committee I chair, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, scrutinises the work of the Cabinet Office and the whole civil service in a way that we hope will improve public confidence in government and public services. We have taken a long interest in public procurement and public contracting, and we saw this crisis as an opportunity to consider the main strategic issues around outsourcing. In fact, we had already—prophetically perhaps—embarked on this inquiry before Carillion collapsed. Its terms of reference included whether the Government made effective decisions on outsourcing the delivery of public services, what lessons could be learned from the collapse and, given that the Government depend on so few public service providers, whether the rules on oversight and accountability of contracts needed to be changed.

PACAC’s findings were published this week, and they are stark. We uncover that sometimes the Government have little or no data on the services they wish to outsource or on the facilities they ask companies to manage. In some instances, what Government data there was was actually incorrect. My understanding—we could not put this in the report because we could not get it in evidence—of the Carillion prisons contract is that the Government originally thought they were transferring about 800 assets, but it turned out that the company was taking over the management of some 8,000 assets. How can such vast errors be made? I am afraid that it underlines how badly public services are run by Departments, but the lesson is not simply to pass that underlines how badly public services are run by Departments, but the lesson is not simply to pass that ignorance on as a risk to a private contractor and expect it to cope. We know that the Government are aware of that and have demanded that contractors accept in the contract the risks of their giving them incorrect information. There is no excuse for this carrying on.

We uncover a culture focused relentlessly on cost—by which I mean price—whereby companies are pushed beyond the limits of commercial viability and where procedures on transparency are not regularly followed. Most staggeringly of all, the Government cannot accurately assess the capacity of companies to which they are outsourcing to deliver a quality service. During the inquiry, PACAC found several instances where the Government had contracted with the private sector without knowing key data about the services they were asking companies to bid for. For example, in 2014, the NAO reported that the outsourcing company Compass had won contracts basically being awarded on price, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby companies are prepared to bear, compared to public shareholders.

Ronnie Cowan: What the hon. Gentleman is saying is typical of the attitude that Carillion was too big to fail—and not just with HS2; there was £158 million for Hestia with the Ministry of Defence and £62 million for electrification of the rail line from London to Corby. While the Government continued to give Carillion all those contracts, its suppliers must have been thinking, “Well, my money is safe here, too. If the Government believe in these big companies, I’m okay.” There is a knock-on effect, a domino effect, right the way through the process, and ultimately smaller companies suffered and failed.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I totally agree with the concept that these contracts become too big to fail, and therefore, as I will explain, it becomes an illusion that the Government have transferred risk to these companies. These companies are a private sector extension of the public sector, and the public sector still carries the risk.

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): My hon. Friend spoke earlier of contracts basically being awarded on price, rather than on any kind of value. Does he agree with the CBI’s response to the Carillion report that suppliers to the public sector need to “bid responsibly” for contracts and need to be “prepared to challenge” bad deals and to “walk away” from opportunities that will not yield long-term value? The reality is we have a group of companies in this country that seem to be addicted to bidding on price, and this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, la Carillion.

Sir Bernard Jenkin: I agree, but unfortunately I think that the Government have fed that addiction. The pressures of austerity and the hunt for savings have encouraged the Government to try to get prices down and to be blind to the risks they are transferring to the private sector, resulting in the sickness of the sector. As I will explain, there is a misappreciation of the risks that private shareholders are prepared to bear, compared with the risks that we should be taking with public services and public money.
[Sir Bernard Jenkin]

As I have said, the Government sometimes write into contracts that companies must accept the risk that the Government have got their own data wrong. An analysis disclosed by Serco found that this practice had taken place in 12 of the company’s recent procurements. That is in part driven by the decision to use contractual models such as payment by results that involve risk transfer on a huge scale. If the Government cannot assess the services they are trying to source, they simply cannot make an accurate calculation of a fair cost for the outsourcers, yet they tend to pretend to do so. In those circumstances, passing the risk on to contractors is unacceptable and, as we have seen, proves counterproductive, particularly if the Government are unable or unwilling to make a serious assessment of what is at risk when a company delivers public services.

PACAC found that the relentless drive to bring down costs has been among the most damaging factors. We received evidence from organisations and businesses in the sector that the Government have been “driven by price exclusively”, leading to a reduction in fees paid by up to 25% to 30%. Some people put it more bluntly: Rupert Soames, the chief executive officer of Serco, told us that “in the four and half years that I have been running Serco I know one occasion” when Serco had won a contract despite not being the lowest bidder. A survey conducted by the CBI revealed that 98% of businesses responding said that something other than “service quality” was the main reason why Government contracts are awarded. There are obvious problems with an undue reliance on price in the contracting process; industry leaders were concerned that “fudges” would “allow technically poor but cheap bidders to continue... simply because the customer is desperate for the saving.” Such bidders would then seek to renegotiate the price afterwards.

There are examples of all this going badly wrong. The Government, who are frequently the dominant purchaser in these markets, have great power to dictate prices to contractors. Professor Gary Sturgess, of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government—and why did we abolish our National School of Government—and so have no equivalent institution?—told PACAC that companies were “stupid to have gone ahead and entered into contracts... simply because the customer is desperate for the saving.”

Representatives from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations said that, on average, “large charities lose 11% on each contract they have with the government.” There is something rather unpleasant about Government milking charities to subsidise public services, but that is, in effect, what is happening.

Instead of recognising that the focus on cost damages the ability of companies to meet the terms of their contracts and discourages innovation, the Government have taken a different approach. In some instances, they forgo performance penalties available to them, in essence declining to enforce the parts of the outsourcing contract that are designed to maintain the high standards of the service being provided, at the agreed price. In others, the Government have renegotiated the terms of some contracts. We received evidence from the Cabinet Office that just since 2016 the Government have renegotiated at least £120 million-worth of contracts in that way, including the Ministry of Justice’s flagship “Transforming Rehabilitation” scheme. The cost to the Government of the work necessary for the renegotiation itself is yet unknown.

PACAC found that the Government do not have a strong evidence base about when and whether to use the private sector, or whether such use will be more successful than using the public sector. This is what we call the decision to make or buy. The Treasury Green Book sets out a process that should be gone through when deciding whether to make or buy a service—whether to do it in house or put it out to contract—but we found no evidence that that was well understood or indeed followed. There is also a lack of a central database for outsourcing contracts, meaning that systematic analysis of outsourcing throughout the whole of Government is difficult at best, if not impossible. Nowhere is there an understanding of how much public service risk is being carried by each company, across all of its contracts and across all Departments. Without that kind of understanding, the Government are unable to prove the basic premise behind all forms of Government outsourcing: that the private sector is capable of providing a better service for better value. The basis for the claims made by the Minister who wrote the article in The Times earlier this week is data that is now some 20 years out of date. All that data should be published, as public confidence will not be strengthened without far more openness and transparency about how public contracts are let and managed. Nowhere is that more apparent than with private finance initiatives.

The ostensible purpose of PFIs was to take advantage of the expertise of the private sector in providing privately-financed infrastructure projects and buildings. However, despite having more than 20 years to research and form an evidence base, the Government were unable to justify their claims about the efficacy of PFI. In fact, in their testimony to PACAC, the Government claimed that PFI brought “discipline and rigour” to projects. But, while giving evidence, the chief executive of the civil service revealed that the real purpose is to make the public balance sheet look better. That motive can also be seen in the refinancing provisions for PFI, which allow the balance sheet to look better at the expense of the public finances.

It gets even worse than that. With private finance 2, it was decided that the proceeds of refinancing PFIs should be split between the contractors and the Government. After a school has been built and it is in the process of being managed, a lot of the risk has been carried, so the scheme can be refinanced at a lower rate of interest. It was decided that the benefits of that lower interest rate should be split 50:50 between the Government and the private sector. That was not the case with the original PFI scheme. It subsequently became apparent that, under the rather arcane public accounting rules, if such a change is made, the whole of the debt becomes public sector debt and is shown in the public sector borrowing requirement, so the Government said, “Oh, well, we’ll split it 70:30.” Therefore the Government now collect only 30% of the payments due under PFI schemes. That is daft. It is the Government giving away public money just to satisfy silly public accounting rules. It should stop.
There are also issues concerning churn among civil service staff that make the management of public contracts difficult. Reports have highlighted the “insufficient continuity of staff” over the lifetime of a contract. On this front, the situation has been improving, but there is a great deal to do.

PACAC remains concerned that the Government are still taking a much too transactional approach to contracting and the management of contracts. It is vital not only that staff with commercial skills work alongside those within Government with other skills such as costing, IT and project management, but that those in the Government who manage the contract feel that those in the private sector are partners and collaborators. There should be trust and co-operation; it should not be an adversarial competition. When the Government make the decision to outsource a service, and when they accept bids from companies seeking to win the contracts for those services, it is crucial that the process of doing so is evidence-based and transparent.

It was to ensure that there was public trust in outsourcing, and in the Government’s capacity to do so, that Carillion was awarded contracts after it published a profit warning and after it had made other worrying sounds to the Government. That a company in the process of going bust should be awarded yet more contracts, giving it access to yet more taxpayer money, does raise the questions brought up by the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) earlier. PACAC calls for the Government to re-examine how they assess contractors’ viability. Shareholders are prepared to take a far higher risk than the risk the Government should be prepared to take with public services and public money. The Government should publish their rationale for their decisions. Public service procurement cannot be done in the dark, cannot be done without evidence and cannot be done without the Government knowing what they are trying to outsource. It cannot be done on the cheap, and the public must be able to see that.

In conclusion, unless the right steps are taken and the right lessons are learned, a company very similar to Carillion, holding contracts of enormous public worth, could collapse again and all this will happen again. The public want companies that deliver public services better and after it had made other worrying sounds to the Government. That a company in the process of going bust should be awarded yet more contracts, giving it access to yet more taxpayer money, does raise the questions brought up by the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) earlier. PACAC calls for the Government to re-examine how they assess contractors’ viability. Shareholders are prepared to take a far higher risk than the risk the Government should be prepared to take with public services and public money. The Government should publish their rationale for their decisions. Public service procurement cannot be done in the dark, cannot be done without evidence and cannot be done without the Government knowing what they are trying to outsource. It cannot be done on the cheap, and the public must be able to see that.

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Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. We will now have a time limit of five minutes.

4.23 pm

Mr Pat McFadden (Wolverhampton South East) (Lab): I shall endeavour to be brief, Madam Deputy Speaker, as many of the points about the collapse of Carillion have already been made by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) and the hon. Member for Harwich and North Essex (Sir Bernard Jenkin).

Carillion’s headquarters was in Wolverhampton. Of its 18,000 or so UK employees, some 450 were employed in the headquarters, so the city that I represent has a particular interest in the story of the company’s collapse. Six months after the collapse, there are still major questions about corporate governance, audit, ongoing costs, and, perhaps most fundamentally, the policy implications raised by the collapse. I thank both the Work and Pensions Committee and the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee for their joint report, which paints a very stark picture, describing a story of “recklessness, hubris and greed”. On the accounts of the company, it describes them as having “misrepresented the reality of the business.”

The report sets out how the company collapsed, how the internal checks and balances failed and it makes damning indictments of the company’s leadership and the system of auditing, culminating in the recommendation that the whole audit system be referred to the Competition and Markets Authority.

Others will focus on particular parts of this story, but the part on which I wish to focus is the role of Government and the decisions before Government when a company of this nature is in danger of collapse. I have written to the Minister before about these questions. Carillion is a specific type of company. It was a private company, but it was engaged for much of its activity in the delivery of public services. Therefore, the responsibilities cross both the public and the private sectors. The National Audit Office report on this issue, published last month, says that the company, in its dying days, asked for a loan of £160 million from Government and a deferment in tax payments of £63 million. That is a difficult decision for Government. What do Ministers or officials do when a company comes and asks for such substantial funds? In those circumstances, Ministers and the government machine have to make an assessment between loaning that kind of money and letting the company go under.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): My right hon. Friend will know that the National Audit Office report has outlined that, in 2017, Carillion projected a loss of £83 million on the Royal Liverpool University Hospital. Does he know where that projected loss now sits?

Mr McFadden: That is a very good question and is exactly the kind of thing that Ministers had to look at when considering this request. In letting the company go under, the Cabinet Office realised that the taxpayer was still on the hook, because at the moment that it decided to say no to the company’s request for the loan, it gave the official receiver £150 million of taxpayers’ money to process the liquidation. Therefore, the taxpayer being on the hook does not stop when the decision is made to allow the company to go under. The taxpayer has been on the hook for the six months of this story, and it does not stop with the money for the official receiver. Public sector bodies are facing a 20% premium for some of the post-liquidation service delivery costs. As my hon. Friend just said, there are three major projects that lie unfinished. There is the Midland Metropolitan Hospital, the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, which he raised earlier this week in Parliament, and the Aberdeen bypass.

One question that I hope the Minister addresses is the one raised by my hon. Friend a moment ago. What will it cost to finish these projects and where will the money come from? The National Audit Office says that these projects face losses respectively of £91 million for the Aberdeen bypass, £83 million for the Royal Liverpool University Hospital, and £48 million for the Midland Metropolitan Hospital. In his winding up, will the Minister confirm how these projects will be finished
and how they will be paid for? It was a public policy decision to build a new hospital in Liverpool; it was a public policy decision to build a new hospital in Sandwell; and it was a public policy decision to build a new road in Aberdeen, so whoever is carrying out the project, the public policy responsibility, in the end, still lies with Government. Can the Minister confirm that at the moment of collapse, the Government thought that the cost might not be the £150 million that they set aside, but more than £300 million, as paragraph 13 of the National Audit Office summary suggests?

This not just a story of corporate mismanagement; it raises major public policy questions. What does the Minister think are the lessons for Government decision making about: how procurement happens; whether a contract is to be tendered and how that tendering process is managed; and how they balance the risk of rescue and the cost to the taxpayer when a company engaged in the delivery of public services is in danger of collapse? Those are the fundamental public policy questions raised by this story.

Several hon. Members rose—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. Clearly the House wants the Minister to have time to respond to the matters that have been raised in the debate. Therefore, there will now be a time limit of three minutes.

4.30 pm

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton North) (Ind): I cannot possibly deliver my speech in three minutes, but I will do my best.

I am pleased to be able to speak in this significant debate on an issue that marks a turning point in Britain’s politics and economics. The collapse of Carillion should see the end of a huge policy mistake—the dogma-driven tragedy of the privatising, outsourcing and marketising of our public services. It is now time to accept that mistake, and to begin the process of rebuilding the public utilities and public services established in the early post-war decades that underpinned the enormous social advances achieved in those times.

The neoliberal economic model has brought political and economic instability, slower and erratic growth rates, and greater inequality—a world where the mega-wealthy and unconstrained private banking and corporate power have prospered at the expense of the rest of us. The death knell for neoliberalism was sounded by the 2008 crisis, when a catastrophic financial collapse was prevented only by spending billions of taxpayers’ cash to prop up the corrupt and out-of-control banking system. But the Frankenstein’s monster did not quite die then, and has limped along for another decade despite financial scandals and failures, with the public purse being ripped off time and again. The collapse of Carillion is one more nail in the coffin of the monster, but it is still not dead. It is time to ensure that it finally dies, and soon.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, which is an excellent Committee with a first-class Chair and brilliant staff. As we have heard, the Committee has just produced its own report, which is very well written and contains much good material, but I was unable to support it because it did not draw the obvious conclusion that the drive to outsource and privatisé—to hand vast sums of public money to grasping private companies through PFI schemes and outsourcing—has been an enormous and costly mistake, driven by ideology and not the public interest. We should have said in the report that PFI should be abandoned forthwith, and that the process of insourcing should be supported and accelerated.

The report says: “PFI financing costs more than government financing because the state can borrow at a cheaper rate than the private sector. While we are confident that PFI costs more than conventional procurement, neither...the National Audit Office nor the Public Accounts Committee can find any evidence of the benefits the Government claims”.

This is pretty damning, but the report stops short of saying that PFI should be stopped now and for good and confined to the dustbin of history.

We have been here before—long before Carillion—with the collapse of Jarvis 14 years ago. At that time, I put a question to the then Prime Minister in the following terms:

“My right hon. Friend will be aware that the private finance initiative contractor, Jarvis, has been teetering on the brink of bankruptcy for weeks now. This is putting at risk a large number of school repair schemes and other public sector works. Would he not think it sensible, given that Jarvis’s share price has now collapsed to junk levels, to buy out all those public sector schemes, get them done in the public sector, and save billions of pounds of public money?”—[Official Report, 14 July 2004; Vol. 423, c. 1408.]

As hon. Members may have guessed, I received no sensible answer. Now, 14 years on, we have Carillion, and the present Government are still persisting with the failed models of privatisation, including the appalling PFI.

Some public authorities are beginning to insource, with significant financial and service benefits, but the drive to privatisé continues, especially in the national health service. The failures of the model are legion, from prisons to probation, and from long-term care to smaller issues such as building control. But perhaps the greatest—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order.

4.33 pm

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I want to take this opportunity to draw attention to the Royal Liverpool Hospital in the centre of Liverpool, which, given the all the important issues that have been raised in this debate, stands as a monument to the corporate greed that led to the collapse of Carillion. It is a tragic sight and eventuality for the people of Liverpool, who are now kept completely in the dark about what will happen in the future.

The £335 million hospital is 90% complete, but as the NHS searches for a new contractor to take over, we have no timescale for the completion of the site. Building work has stopped altogether, state-of-the-art medical equipment goes to waste in empty wards, and there are questions over whether the building is structurally sound. In recent evidence to a parliamentary joint inquiry, it emerged that there were serious structural issues. Two cracks were discovered in concrete beams at the hospital,
and following a review by Carillion, further cracks were discovered in six other beams. Now the private company Arup has been hired to conduct a structural review.

I say to Ministers that we must have transparency about what happens now, in the aftermath of the collapse of Carillion, to such capital projects. It is not good enough to have private meetings from which the public are simply excluded. Yesterday, the Minister told me that public ownership would mean that the taxpayer would shoulder the risk, but surely that is nonsense when we know that the risk is always shouldered by the taxpayer in these cases anyway.

The collapse of Carillion is a watershed moment. In order to truly learn the lessons, we must recognise that it is not good enough to tinker around the edges of a broken system: the task is to replace it altogether. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor has said that the Royal Liverpool Hospital is “just another scandalous example of the Government wasting money on failing PFI schemes...The Government should take responsibility and commit to delivering the Royal Liverpool in the public sector.”

Let me finish by pushing the Minister and the Government to show some urgency. Will he tell us publicly what meetings he is holding? Is he meeting the hospital company that is delivering this project? Are Ministers meeting the investors, Legal & General and the European Investment Bank? What do Ministers know about the structural state of the building overall? Are the Government seeking legal advice? For the people of Liverpool, the question is, “Will this hospital ever open?”, and I think they need an answer.

4.36 pm

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I should start by putting on the record a mistake that I made in my speech in the previous debate, when I said that it was my 100th contribution to the House. It was actually my 99th contribution, so this is my 100th contribution to the House. I made a slight miscalculation.

As my hon. Friend and neighbour the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) said, the collapse of Carillion happened six months ago. I was here in the House on that day, six months on from my maiden speech. It is quite apt that a year on, we are back here to review the collapse of Carillion.

Let us make no mistake: the collapse of Carillion as a company was a complete disaster, putting at risk 420 public sector contracts, more than 1,400 jobs and tens of thousands of subcontractor jobs. It had contracts with Network Rail, the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Justice, HS2 and more. The Local Government Association counted 30 councils as being directly affected, and 220 schools. The ripple effects could be seen in every town, city and county in this country, and in such diverse areas as construction, maintenance, the armed forces and the NHS.

How can we restore public values in public procurement? We must use public money not only wisely but strategically, in the interest of communities and regions. UK plc commissions over £250 billion of goods and services, and we can use that to get the best deal for the country. There are lessons and recommendations for the future from the collapse. We should insist on in-house options being considered alongside outsourcing and commissioning, particularly within local government. When a service cannot feasibly be provided in-house, we should look at working together with local authorities. In Leeds, we set up Civic Enterprise Leeds, which uses municipal staff in areas like catering, cleaning and plant nurseries. We can use our £250 billion of buying power to ensure that every worker who is employed with a company using a Government contract receives the real living wage—as independently calculated by the Living Wage Foundation, not the supposed living wage brought forward by the Government.

Speaking as chair of the all-party parliamentary group on social enterprise, I know that there is some unfinished business on the Public Sector (Social Value) Act 2012. That is an Act without teeth. It asks for public bodies only to consider social value in commissioning. Instead, it should compel social value in commissioning. If we had that compulsion, then perhaps instances of commissioning risky businesses such as Carillion would never have happened. We can also look at how we score contracts and measure their social value so that we have the same standards across the piece. We cannot allow the risky behaviour that led to the collapse of Carillion to happen again.

4.39 pm

Chris Stephens (Glasgow South West) (SNP): First, I thank the hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) for securing this debate. It was a pleasure to be on the joint inquiry, chaired by the hon. Lady and the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field). All I can say, having sat on that inquiry, is that the evidence revealed at every session was a real eye-opener. The report stands as one of the most damning indictments of the total failure of a political ideology that assumes that privatisation and outsourcing are always value for money and better than the public sector. The report does not, to use that Glaswegian phrase, miss and hit the wall. If there is one sentence that sums up the entire farce, it is this:

“Carillion’s business model was an unsustainable dash for cash. The mystery is not that it collapsed, but how it kept going for so long.”

I have often wondered what quality in someone’s character enables them to collect the eye-watering salaries and bonuses that typify the worst excesses of the corporate world. I can only come to the conclusion that the answer is shamelessness, because it certainly was not competence or caution with public money. However, as the evidence sessions went on, I was clear that it was not just an organisational failure in one company, but a systematic multi-organisational failure.

The key themes revealed were corporate greed, lack of regulation, the big four auditing companies creaming money from struggling companies and pensions scheme stability sacrificed for dividends to shareholders. It was quite astonishing evidence. I asked Carillion’s chief executive, Keith Cochrane, whether dividends to shareholders were a higher priority than employees in the pension scheme. His answer was that he would not look at it that way. The hon. Member for Leeds West went on to say that if parents had two children and the younger child was getting paid less pocket money than the eldest child, and the youngest child said to the mother, “I think I’m a lower priority,” the mother would not necessarily reply, “That is not the way to look at it, dear.” That was some of the astonishing evidence we got from the company.
It was quite clear that the company was ready to dump the pension fund into the Pension Protection Fund; it was very clear on that. Its business model relied on even more acquisitions, rising debt, expansion into new markets and exploitation of suppliers, with a side order of creative accounting and an out-of-control bonus culture. The company was gambling with public assets and finances, always seeking to eliminate any competitors, squeezing subcontractors and suppliers through delayed payments as a matter of course and ignoring its pensions liabilities. Those tactics are straight out of the Robert Maxwell school of risky business. The only element of risk that was carefully managed was ensuring that bonuses could not be recovered in the event of problems arising with the company. Boardroom lifebelts were well and truly secured on this corporate version of the Titanic, with the auditors signing off on their assurances as the SS Carillion steered full speed ahead to the icebergs.

The practice of illusory advisory firms telling clients exactly what they want to hear in order to secure future business was a feature of the 2008 crash and has continued despite everything. As the report states: "Advisory firms are not incentivised to act as a check on recklessly run businesses. A long and lucrative relationship is not secured by unduly rocking the boat."

The culture of corporate back-scratching and covering for one another has flourished in the absence of any firm regulatory regime. The frustration for those of us with a public sector background is seeing the chickens come home to roost when all along trade unions have been making the case against privatisation, based on well-founded fears of what happens when profit becomes a central feature of public sector delivery. What price public services when those in charge of delivering them operate in an environment of chaos, with contempt for the concept and ethos of public service delivery? The key question is this: how many more wake-up calls do there have to be before people intervene?

4.44 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): I congratulate the three Select Committees on the fine work they have carried out in investigating and coming up with conclusions on the Carillion fiasco. I thank my hon. and right hon. Friends—my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves), who introduced the debate so expertly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden) and my hon. Friends the Members for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) and for Liverpool, Walton (Dan Carden)—for their excellent speeches.

The collapse of Carillion was indeed a fiasco—a fiasco for the 30,000 employees and the 20,000 subcontractors; for the 27,000 members of its defined pension schemes, who will now have to rely on the Pension Protection Fund for a reduced pension; for the 30,000 suppliers who are owed £2 billion in unpaid invoices; for the children who depended on school meals; for our armed forces personnel whose housing was mismanaged; and for the taxpayer who is picking up the tab for the colossal failure of the Government to safeguard large sums of public money and the delivery of outsourced services and construction contracts.

In Liverpool, the obvious example of the fiasco, as my hon. Friend, and constituency neighbour, the Member for Liverpool, Walton said, is the failure to complete the Royal Liverpool Hospital. Construction came to a grinding halt when Carillion collapsed. It is completely unacceptable that the Government have not taken over the contracts to make sure that, in the interests of patients, the Royal is finished. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East said, the same applies to the hospital in Birmingham and the road in Aberdeen. Those are all examples of the fundamental flaws and costs of PFI and, too often, the way in which public contracts are delivered in the private sector.

Last August, Carillion extended payment terms to an outrageous 120 days and charged suppliers a fee for early payment. Such behaviour is indefensible, yet Carillion was a signatory of the prompt payment code. Will the Minister tell us why the Government were not policing their own payment terms and their own code? That prompts the question whether such payment terms are being enforced now. Why were new contracts worth £2 billion awarded after the change of payment terms, after the profit warnings and after the changes in senior management? Why did Government officials accept assurances from Carillion management about the viability of the company, even as it headed towards the cliff edge, and why did Ministers not challenge their own officials? Will the Government support the proposals of the Institute of Directors for a body to be created to police the directors of major companies?

The company continued to pay out executive bonuses and dividends, while reforming its pay policy to protect management from the possibility of having to repay their bonuses. The arrogance and corporate greed that have been described at Carillion simply will not be tolerated any more either by industry or by the wider public. The CBI wants performance in the payment of suppliers to be a consideration in tendering for public contracts. It is also calling for the publication of payment data. Labour Members agree with it and we will be including payment of suppliers as an essential criterion in our procurement policy in government. The next Labour Government will take the action needed to stop the late payment culture that cost our economy £2.5 billion last year and forced 50,000 small businesses to close. This Government have failed to do so. We will guard against insolvency by mandating the use of project bank accounts and retention deposit schemes in public construction contracts.

The chair of KPMG accepts the need for reform, but it is frustrating to learn that he “respectfully disagrees” with Select Committee members who described the firm’s audit of Carillion as complacent. I am afraid that his comments reinforce that very sense of complacency and it is fair to say that many people will respectfully disagree with him. The time has come for an overhaul of our audit system and of the cosy relationships that have come to characterise the way in which the big four accountancy firms operate, so will the Minister tell us whether the Government support the calls for a break-up of the big four accountancy practices? Whether it is the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee saying that they do not follow Treasury process, the abandoned construction site at the Royal Liverpool Hospital, the failure to enforce their own much trumpeted prompt payment code, or ignoring publicly available information about profit warnings, changes of senior management and excessive bonus payments, this Government have been found wanting, all at the cost of public services and the public finances.
The Government have appointed a senior partner at Slaughter and May as an adviser, despite the £8 million in fees paid to the firm by Carillion, which included £1 million on the day before it collapsed. I had hoped that the Government would have learned from the Carillion fiasco, but the Slaughter and May appointment suggests that they have learned nothing. The mismanagement of Carillion’s contracts was a massive failure by the Government, and the worst of rent seeking and wealth extraction by the few at the expense of the many. However, that culture is coming to an end. The public are appalled by the excesses of Carillion, and the consequences of that for suppliers, workers and public services, and so, too, are the vast majority of decent, hard-working, responsible business people.

The next Labour Government will be a strong partner for businesses that want to put the public good first—businesses that want to work with trade unions, recognise that decent pay and conditions are good for business as well as for workers, and want to treat suppliers fairly and pay them well and promptly. Labour will be the party of responsible business and responsible contracting—the party of business for the many, not the few.

I believe we have been successful in mitigating the very serious impacts of the liquidation, and 12,345 jobs have been safeguarded so far—some 68% of the pre-liquidation workforce—compared with 2,404 redundancies. I recognise that 2,404 redundancies is a very serious matter for all those concerned but there can be no doubt that it is an unprecedented result for such a small number of people to have been made redundant, in comparison with the size of that business. That is testament to the efforts not just of Government, but of industry more widely, which ensured a speedy and positive response.

A total of 876 apprenticeships have been transferred to new employers so that those young people can continue to embark on their careers. At the request of the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the banks put together nearly £1 billion of support for those affected, including £100 million of enterprise finance guarantee from the taxpayer-owned British Business Bank.

However, it is also important that we learn the lessons of Carillion’s insolvency and ensure that we do everything in our power to avoid such an event happening again. The Government have taken steps to ensure that the causes of the insolvency will be fully investigated, and of course we are taking into account all the work that has been done by the Select Committees. I remind hon. Members that the investigations that have already commenced include those by the official receiver, the Financial Reporting Council, as requested by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Financial Conduct Authority.

The official receiver has powers to obtain information and, if misconduct is proven, can recover assets, pursue disqualification proceedings or refer the case for prosecution if criminality is discovered. The Financial Reporting Council has also commenced an investigation into the actions of two finance directors of Carillion and the conduct of KPMG as Carillion’s auditors. We are determined to get to the bottom of this. The Secretary of State has also recruited the eminent Sir John Kingman to undertake a thorough review of the FRC to ensure that it is doing exactly what it should be in order to be a robust and effective regulator. We are giving Sir John all the support he needs to conduct that thorough investigation. The Financial Conduct Authority is investigating whether Carillion manipulated financial statements prior to July 2017 and it is also considering allegations of insider trading.

I reassure the House that the Government are committed to ensuring that the insolvency is thoroughly investigated. Tens of thousands of documents are being considered and we will ensure that we get to the truth. The Government are also committed to ensuring that we learn the lessons. First, we are tackling the problem of late payments. It is clear that payment terms beyond 60 days are unacceptable in the vast majority of cases. Last year, we introduced the payment reporting regulations, which require the UK’s largest firms to report on their payment policies and payment performance every six months. The hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) said that, under a future Labour Government, everyone would be paid on time—my concern is that nobody would be paid if there were a Labour Government.

We want to provide transparency in payment practices, ensuring that small and medium-sized enterprises have more information about large firms that they are considering doing business with. My hon. Friend the Minister for Implementation has overseen a consultation on how we can take the payment performance of Government suppliers into account when awarding major contracts, which is one of the things the hon. Member for Leeds West was concerned about. We have issued a call for evidence on how we can end the scourge of late payments.
Secondly, in relation to how the Government manage their key suppliers, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster set out in his speech on 25 June how we would do that, including introducing effective contingency plans; introducing a playbook of guidelines, rules and principles; and requiring suppliers to publish key performance indicators on our more important contractors.

Thirdly, in relation to corporate governance, my Department is implementing new regulations relating to executive pay—that was mentioned in the debate—and bringing in extra transparency and accountability in the way executive pay at listed companies is handled. We are consulting on reform of the insolvency and corporate governance regime, including on important areas such as the framework within which companies determine dividend payments and strengthening shareholder stewardship.

The hon. Member for Leeds West raised the issue of what she called the Government’s prompt payment code. I just remind her that that code is a voluntary, industry-led code of practice that enables businesses to demonstrate to suppliers that they are committed to prompt payment. Of course it needs reform and improvement, but it is industry-led.

I can assure the House that the Government are determined to learn the lessons of the insolvency of Carillion and put in place a regime that protects shareholders, workers and all those businesses connected in the supply chain.

4.59 pm

Rachel Reeves: It has been a real privilege to have this debate in the Chamber today, and I welcome the contributions from all hon. Members, including the Front-Bench spokespeople and the Minister. As Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee, I get to see the best of British business, but sadly also the worst, and Carillion was the very worst of business. We now need to learn the lessons, because we saw the impact on small businesses, pensioners, workers and investors. I urge the Government, when they respond to the Committee’s report—the response is due on Monday 16 July—to respond in detail to the points on corporate governance, regulation, audit market reform and outsourcing. We need those changes, and we need them urgently, if we are to ensure that we learn the lessons of the collapse of Carillion, get justice for those affected and ensure that we see more of the best of British business and less of the worst.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered lessons from the collapse of Carillion.

PETITION

Home Education: draft guidance and consultation

5 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to present a petition by 88 constituents from Ilford South, the lead signatory being Ms Sansel Smith. Similar petitions were presented by the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell) on 4 July, but I was unable to get this petition to him at that time, so I am presenting it today.

The petition reads:

The petition of residents of Ilford South Constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002196]
Rail Passenger Comfort

Motion made, and Question proposed. That this House do now adjourn.—(Jo Churchill.)

5.3 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): As ever, it is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very grateful for this opportunity to speak about what I fully accept is not the most pressing issue on the railways today, and I make it clear at the outset that I know that many passengers on lines affected by the chaos from the new timetables on Northern and Govia Thameslink Railway would welcome any train, not just one that is comfortable.

The Transport Committee, on which I serve, is currently examining those matters, so in no way do I wish to diminish the importance and urgency of those issues, which I hope will be short term and resolved relatively soon. However, I wish to speak on a more longer-term, strategic issue for the railways: ensuring that passengers have a decent level of comfort while travelling by train. The problem is not a lack of investment in our railways—quite the reverse. Most franchises in the country have either had or are in line to have wonderful new trains that are technologically superior and will offer faster journey times, lower emissions and generally much better performance.

Train company order books are healthy, which is much to be welcomed, but there has been considerable criticism from passengers on the most recently introduced trains that the seats are—not to put too fine a point on it—extremely uncomfortable. The passengers have often paid large sums to travel on those trains. There has been particular criticism of the new Thameslink trains, the class 700s. They have what are described as “ironing board” seats, which are as comfortable as that name suggests; they also have minimal leg room and no tables on which to put a laptop or a cup of coffee.

Another line that has attracted considerable criticism is the Great Western. The intercity express programme trains—the flagship new rolling stock—are wonderfully technically superior, but the seats are not comfortable, and journeys can last for up to five hours for people who are travelling all the way down to Devon or Cornwall. Similarly, Eurostar has refurbished, or bought new trains, which are also wonderful—I travel on them regularly—but the seats are greatly inferior to those on the trains that they replaced.

My personal gripe is this. Is it really beyond our ability to align seats and windows? On too many trains, one ends up sitting next to a window pillar throughout the journey and can therefore see very little out of the window. To compare the new seats one ends up sitting being next to window pillars, and one could see very little. Technology and safety requirements have evolved, and today seats must conform to fire and crash safety regulations. In no way do I wish to diminish the importance of that.

Jack Lopresti (Filton and Bradley Stoke) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I am massively impressed by his technical knowledge of rolling stock and comfortable seats. Passenger comfort and safety are obviously important, but so are the comfort and safety of the people who operate and work on trains. On the Severn Beach line, a local service in my constituency, it is virtually impossible for conductors and other staff to move along the trains at peak times. Not only does that have significant implications for their own comfort and health and safety, but they cannot always collect tickets and then report accurately on how many people are using the service, which could affect its long-term viability.

Iain Stewart: I should declare that I am a railway buff and therefore have an unhealthy level of detailed knowledge about these matters. My hon. Friend has made a good point. There is a trade-off to be made between having comfortable seats and having enough seats. I shall return to that in a moment, but he is right to say that the comfort and safety of those who work on our railways are as important as the comfort and safety of passengers, and if he will bear with me, I shall touch on that as well in a little while.

As I have said, I do not want to see any diminution of the existing safety requirements. It has been suggested that that is the reason for the uncomfortable seats, but I think that that is incorrect, because there are plenty of seat designs that would comply with the safety requirements. I have to conclude that, owing to specifications from the Department for Transport and cost issues for the train operating companies, they have gone for the cheaper alternatives. The TOCs have a financial incentive in terms of their balance sheets to have the cheapest fitted-out carriage, but I will come on to argue that that is a false economy if they wish to sustain their business into the long term.

The Department specifies that new trains must have a certain passenger capacity, which is why seats are increasingly jammed together with minimal legroom, and there is always going to be that trade-off between having enough seats on a train and making them comfortable, but my contention is that that balance has been skewed too much in favour of cramming everyone on.

It is also wrong to claim that passengers are just as happy with the new seats on trains as they were with those on the trains they have replaced. That is a false comparison again. On the Great Western, the IEP trains that have been introduced replace the old InterCity 125s but not in their original configuration, which were very comfortable. First Great Western, as it was then, went through a so-called refurbishment programme a number of years ago and made the trains very uncomfortable indeed, with garish lighting and high seats that passengers could see very little around. To compare the new seats with those horrible ones is therefore not much of a comparison.

I accept that there are different requirements for different types of line. Clearly, I am not asking for a luxurious Pullman coach or a restaurant car to be
added to a high-density metro service, such as the central line up to Epping—although that would be a wonderful innovation and fitting for Madam Deputy Speaker—but it is not practical: high-density metro services have large numbers of people coming on and off at frequent stops. But on intercity services, on regional services and on longer distance commuter ones, perhaps of more than 30 minutes in duration, higher priority should be given to passenger comfort, and it is possible to do so. I recently visited Sweden and travelled on its intercity line between Gothenburg and Stockholm. In its standard class, the seat pitch and comfort was comparable to many of the first-class coaches on British lines, so this is perfectly possible.

Why is this important? It comes down to the railways keeping their share of the market on lines that will have a large discretionary element. Some commuter lines are the only viable way to get into, or out of, a major city, but many railways are competing: each TOC is competing with other train operators and with other non-rail modes of transport. It is instructive to look at the example of Virgin Trains East Coast and ask why it got into trouble. It did so not because it was losing money or running a bad service; its problem was that it did not grow its passenger numbers and consequently revenue as much as it planned when it won the franchise. That gap proved too big to be sustainable, and we all know what happened.

Part of the reason why those numbers did not grow as much as possible was that passengers were choosing to drive or take long-distance coaches or fly between many of the long-distance destinations. That is a warning sign for the railways. Passenger numbers are beginning to plateau as work and retail habits change. Increasingly, there is new technology, too: cars are getting better, petrol is comparatively cheaper, and if technology evolves and we get more semi or fully autonomous cars, that will be a major source of competition for the railways.

The railways counter that by giving a good customer environment in which to travel, and I think there is a huge untapped market. Travelling by rail is one of life’s great joys if we have a good journey—if we have a comfortable seat with legroom and space to relax, to work, to gaze out of the window, chat with friends and enjoy a refreshment. There are many ways of having a pleasurable experience. We have only to look at the popularity of Michael Portillo’s “Great British Railway Journeys” to see the appetite of the country for enjoying these experiences.

We also need 21st-century facilities on trains. Wi-fi is increasingly a key requirement for travellers, as is a space for them to use their laptop or tablet and the ability to charge them up. We also have to look at the converse cost involved when passengers have a hellish journey and arrive grumpy, sore and stressed. How productive are they at work, compared with when they have had a good journey?

This leads me to the slightly wider consideration of how we calculate the cost-benefit analysis of investment. Yes, it might be cheaper at the moment for train companies to install the cheapest and most basic type of seating configuration, but if that drives passengers away, is it really in the companies’ financial interests? There is also a wider economic point for the country. We want to increase our productivity, and one way to do that is to ensure that passengers arrive at their destination in a good frame of mind and willing to do some work. This was touched on when we were debating High Speed 2. The calculation of the economic benefit was done solely on how quickly people could get from one point to another, rather than looking at the quality of the time they spent on board and how productively they could use it while travelling to their destination. I urge the Government to draw their boundaries more widely in this regard.

I welcome the fact that the Rail Safety and Standards Board has started a consultation into the minimum specifications for seats to ensure that they are safe. Once we have established that baseline, we can look at what the upward options might be. When does the Minister expect the RSSB to report, and will he tell us how he and his colleagues plan to implement its findings? Will he also look again at how the Department for Transport can specify the specifications for rolling stock? There have been instances of the Department specifying the types of seats required and the cost envelopes for them, and this has resulted in very good seats being installed on trains. If he wants the details, I can tell him that it involved the class 175 and the class 180 specifications a few years ago. Will he also consider imposing minimum standards in future franchise consultations?

Travelling is one of life’s great joys, and it distains me that on many modes of transport passenger comfort is being diminished in the calculations. The airlines have been at it for years, with seat pitches getting smaller and smaller, making air travel a real displeasure in many cases. I really hope that the railways can change the recent trend of squeezing more and more people on, with scant regard for their comfort. I want the railways’ renaissance to continue in this country, and I believe that changing the specifications for seating arrangements in the carriages would represent a major step towards achieving that.

5.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) on securing this timely debate, which covers an important topic. It has already been noted that he is a great expert in this area, and I pay due deference to him not only as a member of the Transport Committee but as a railway nerd of some considerable standing and expertise. We saw his expertise in the debate today in the casual way in which he dropped in the different classes of locomotive and referred to the historical experience and the methods of cost benefit analysis involved in calculating the benefits associated with the journeys that he described.

My hon. Friend will be aware that I am not the Rail Minister, so I should enter a caveat about my own extreme lack of experience and understanding of the issue, but I hope that I will be able to say some things that will give him some comfort and show that the Government are keenly aware of the issue and are addressing it. As he says, this is a long-term issue, and he rightly paints a beguiling picture of the quality of travel in an enhanced Stewart-world, if one may describe it as such. Nothing is more beguiling than the image of you, Madam Deputy Speaker, in a Pullman car—I hope of your own design and specification—being taken to destinations unknown.
To address the questions that have been raised, I will talk a little about the franchising programme and the investments in rolling stock. As the House well knows, passenger numbers have doubled since privatisation of the railways 20-odd years ago, and the country’s railways need to adapt to cope with that and with future demands, which means investing in upgrades and new services across the country. That investment is never more important or evident than when it goes towards modern, comfortable and reliable trains, which are the key to a better railway for passengers. Since 1996—my hon. Friend is the only Member who would know this by heart already—train operators have placed orders for more than 13,000 new carriages across the country. Those carriages have delivered significant benefits to passengers. The old slam-door trains across the south are being retired and replaced. We have high-speed trains on the west coast main line and the imminent replacement of the Pacers in the north with brand-new air-conditioned carriages with what we expect to be state-of-the-art passenger facilities, such as wi-fi, real-time passenger information and USB charging sockets.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, passengers are now being carried on the brand-new intercity express trains on the great western route. As my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) touched on, although some concerns have been uttered about some of the seating, the overwhelming impression, teething problems aside, has been positive. There are also important orders for new trains for passengers in East Anglia and the west midlands. We expect the new trains to help transform the railways, and faster, greener, more pleasant vehicles will not only improve the experiences of those who use them, but set up the traditional cascade of newly refurbished stock to other parts of the network. It is important that operators continue to invest in the benefits of a good passenger experience. The reliable provision of wi-fi on trains is a key priority for passengers, and has become a requirement on all trains through franchising to ensure that customers can get connected. Passengers are also now seeing advanced information systems being rolled out on both new and refurbished trains. Those systems deliver real-time information that helps passengers make informed decisions about their journey.

It is also important to recognise, as my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South would, that it is essential for a rail service that is doing its job properly to be accessible to all passengers. Some of the new trains being built have been designed with integrated devices that fill the gap between the train and the platform, and refurbished trains are being modified to ensure that they will meet modern accessibility requirements. Accessibility is also being baked into new franchise competitions to drive such improvements.

If run properly, a franchising programme should be one of the key drivers of delivering benefits to passengers, and the Department will continue to consult stakeholders before letting each franchise. Once the franchising process is ongoing, we then look for franchise bidders to propose initiatives to improve the quality of rolling stock. The Department for Transport sets the “Rolling Stock Perspective” document, which provides a high-level overview of the kinds of benefits that passengers should expect and that train operators should work towards. Such aspirations are intentionally set up as outputs or results, because we want to leave it to train operators to decide what innovative approaches they can take and what experience they can draw on to help them to meet those goals.

My hon. Friend rightly focused on passenger experience. It is absolutely right that passengers should have high expectations and that the industry should focus on passenger experience—getting on the train, moving through it, whether sitting down or standing, and getting off. The Department has worked hard to understand the expectations of not just passengers but all the parties to the different aspects of train usage—focus groups, representatives of passenger groups and manufacturers—in order to meet expectations. From my own experience, and having met train chief executives, I think it is fair to say that there is a great deal more to be done. My hon. Friend is right to focus on a relative lack of innovation in this area. It will be interesting to see whether more innovation might be possible in future franchising arrangements. We look to train operators to address the challenges he set for the kind of innovation he wishes to see to improve the customer experience. Seat comfort is clearly part of that experience, and he was right to focus on concerns expressed about Thameslink and intercity express trains. He will be interested to understand that a considerable process was undertaken to assess seat comfort on those trains. The Thameslink trains were developed from a specification produced by expert advisers, with significant input from the then operator, and designed by Siemens. That included significant consultation with national and regional passenger groups, which had the opportunity to review the seats and found the comfort levels to be generally satisfactory.

On the intercity express trains currently being introduced on Great Western and shortly on the London and North Eastern Railway, the Department set out in the specification that the seats should be comfortable for two-hour-plus inter-city journeys. Those trains were procured from Hitachi by Agility Trains, which undertook visits with stakeholders to gather feedback on the design and seating comfort. That demonstrates that, as my hon. Friend mentioned, consultation can take place and still not please everyone. That is built into the picture we are describing.

There is no question but that train seating should be comfortable for passengers. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, the design and specification of seats needs to balance the conflicting need for more seats in order to manage escalating passenger demand with the desire to provide sufficient space for each passenger and an ergonomically tested design. He can imagine that, given my height, this is a topic extremely close to my heart, and indeed my lumbar region. Seats must also conform to the relevant European design standards on fire safety and crash-worthiness. There are no objective standards for seat comfort. As my hon. Friend correctly said, the Rail Safety and Standards Board is now managing a research project that will provide a more informed approach to making seats more comfortable and safe. I will be happy to write to him separately to give him guidance if we get any insight into the timing of the process and when it is expected to be completed. That research is aimed at developing a more sophisticated approach to understanding
comfort, taking into account the shape of seats, cushioning, material choice, lumbar spine support—I am pleased to say—vibration, legroom, journey length and many other aspects. The goal is to put together a seat comfort specification with a set of minimum requirements that guards against bad outcomes, as it were, but gives plenty of scope for innovation and improvement.

I am grateful for this debate. Despite its recent travails, the rail industry does take its obligations to passengers in its rolling stock very seriously. I welcome the emphasis that my hon. Friend has placed on discretionary journeys and the importance of innovation and customer service in ensuring that those journeys are given the maximum usage possible. Increasing passenger numbers, coupled with increasing pressures on funds, is creating both challenges and opportunities for innovation and new ideas, but at no time are they more needed than when necessity is the mother of invention. The Department is committed to ensuring that rolling stock meets the needs of passengers now and in the future. As the rail industry evolves, it needs to ensure that passengers and passenger safety and comfort are kept at the heart of everything it does.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*
Westminster Hall

Monday 2 July 2018

[Mr Virendra Sharma in the Chair]

Pet Theft

4.30 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered e-petition 212174 relating to pet theft.

It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. The pet theft petition was created by Dr Daniel Allen, who is in the Public Gallery. He is an animal geographer at Keele University and an animal welfare influencer. Last year, more and more families asked him to share stolen pet posters on Twitter, which he did. Feeling helpless because of the scale of the problem, anxious about the potential risks to his own dog, Rupert, and increasingly upset for the families involved, he teamed up with the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance, known as SAMP A, to campaign for reform of the law on pet theft. Within four months, the pet theft petition achieved 100,000 signatures.

SAMP A has been campaigning since September 2014. The founding members include Debbie Matthews, whom I have met, of Vets Get Scanning, Arnie Wilson of the Dog Union, Richard Jordan of Pet Theft Awareness and Jayne Hayes and Wayne May of DogLost. Last year, SAMP A organised the dog theft awareness day to highlight this growing crime and its devastating impact on families. That Westminster event was hosted by the hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), who is present for our debate. He has been championing reform of the law on pet theft in Parliament for many years.

Dr Daniel Allen and Beverley Cuddy have recently become patrons and Professor John Cooper, QC, is SAMP A's legal adviser. Behind the scenes, the pet theft reform group has worked tirelessly, sharing and promoting the petition. The pet theft petition has been driven by the kindness of strangers and has seen many organisations joining forces.

Special thanks must go to All About The Animals, Animal Advocate, Animal Realities, Animal Watch, APGAW—the all-party parliamentary group for animal welfare—Dogs Trust, the Conservative Animal Welfare Foundation, Dog TAG, the Dog Welfare Alliance, Dougal’s Army, Find Sky, Finn’s Law, the Good Vet and Pet Guide, the Labour Animal Rights Group, Murphy’s Army, the National Animal Welfare Trust, Scouse Pets 2 and the Animal Team, to name a few.

Many magazines have got behind the campaign, including The Countryman, The Countryman’s Weekly, Dogs Monthly, Dogs Today, K9 Magazine, Our Dogs, Pet Gazette, Pet Product Marketing, Shooting Times and The Conversation. Support has also come from popular figures including Ricky Gervais, Jane Fallon, Dermot O’Leary, Sir Bruce Forsyth, Chris Packham, Miranda Hart, Kirsty Gallacher, Paul O’Grady, Paul Ross, Deborah Meaden, Peter Egan, Anna Webb, Jorgie Porter, Lorraine Kelly, Victoria Stilwell, Brian May, Stuart Winter and Brenda Blethen. The campaign has featured on mainstream TV shows—“This Morning”, “Victoria Derbyshire”, “Lorraine”, the ITV national news, Sky news and Look North—and has been covered by nearly every regional and national radio station and newspaper.

There has been an unprecedented response to the House of Commons Facebook post on this debate. I cannot recall another animal-related campaign that has managed to bring together people ranging from animal rights activists to the hunting and shooting fraternity. That is the power of pets—they are part of every family.

Pet theft is a cruel and devastating crime and it is on the rise. Everyone is a potential victim: it hits families, the elderly, the disabled and the homeless.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): My constituency has a high level of rural crime that targets farm dogs. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a particularly heinous crime, in that farm dogs have value because they have skills that can be used on a farm but they are also pets that are loved by their owners?

Mike Hill: I agree entirely. Yes, farm dogs are working dogs, but they are also family pets; they are part of the family.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on holding the debate. I just want to point out that the House is on a one-line Whip today and this debate has achieved a huge turnout, from all parties. I suspect that had the House been sitting formally with a Whip, this Chamber would have been packed. The hon. Gentleman has struck a chord in bringing this issue to the House, and I am sure that there will be unanimous support for the motion. I am here on behalf of my constituents whose dog Daisy has been stolen. They share the outrage that at the moment more than 2,000 dogs a year are stolen, that only 5% of thefts lead to a conviction and that a dog has to be proven to be a working animal and a pet. I fully support, as I am sure we all do, Dogs Trust in its work: we have to correct the law so that people who steal dogs are punished properly.

Mike Hill: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am proud to be leading this e-petition debate, but yes, the issue does have cross-party support.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): This is a timely debate and a big issue among the public. Following on from what has been said, if someone loses their dog or it is stolen, then regardless of the value, it is like a death in the family. I have had animals over the years, and when something happens to them, when they die or anything like that, it is as if there has been a death in the house; there is a sadness about the house. More importantly, it particularly affects children, who are very attached to their animals. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is the case?

Mike Hill: I entirely agree. Pets are indeed part of the family; they are not commodities, as I will go on to say. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: the death of a pet is traumatic for every family member.
Latest statistics from the Pet Food Manufacturers Association show that almost half of British households contain at least one pet and more than a quarter have one or more dogs. Pet Gazette recently said that 89% of pet owners consider their pet to be part of the family. New research by the insurance company Direct Line shows that the number of dogs stolen across Britain has risen by 6.8% in just 12 months, with an average of five dogs stolen every single day in 2017. Last year, 1,909 dogs were reported stolen to police forces; that compares with the 1,788 stolen in 2016.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgewater and West Somerset) (Con): I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is reading out the figures. One problem that we have, with regard to gun dogs mainly, is that they are being stolen for three purposes: first, to be pets, which is straightforward; secondly, for dog fighting, which is horrific; and thirdly, for puppy farms, mainly but not exclusively in the Republic of Ireland. Will the hon. Gentleman continue what he is saying, because he is articulating the absolute essence of what is being done in this country?

Mike Hill: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for that detailed intervention. He is absolutely right; he makes a fair point about gun dogs.

The number of reported dog thefts was 14% higher in 2016 than it was in 2015. Dogs are stolen to order, to sell, to breed, for ransom and even for use as bait and for dog fighting. The Staffordshire bull terrier remains Britain’s most stolen breed. Dogs are stolen from gardens, houses, kennels, from outside—

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): I really commend the hon. Gentleman for leading this debate today. I have owned two Staffordshire bull terriers; sadly, they are no longer with us. The devastation of losing a pet in this way, through being stolen, is horrendous, so does the hon. Gentleman agree not only that the Government need to bring in much stiffer sentences as quickly as possible, but that we need to encourage everyone to scan animals—particularly vets, when an animal is taken to a veterinary surgeon—and we need to ensure that education about this crime is widespread so that people are aware that it is a potential threat? An animal should not just be seen as a piece of property; losing one is really like losing a member of the family.

Mike Hill: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. He goes to the heart of the debate on many of those issues. I know that dogs are stolen outside shops and from cars, and while they are out exercising, on or off the lead. Nowhere is safe for unattended dogs. Owners of bulldogs, pugs, French bulldogs and chihuahuas, for example, have been stalked on walks. Some have had to fight off an attacker who is trying to snatch their dog, or have later been a victim of a home invasion where the only thing stolen was their dog.

Cats are being increasingly targeted. In 2016, 261 cats were reported as stolen to police forces—an increase of 40% on 2014. However, a 2017 study revealed that 360,000 adults believed their cat had been stolen in the past 12 months. SAMPA believes those figures only scratch the surface, as police forces record this crime differently across the country and theft by finding is never recorded in police figures. Everyone assumes it will not happen to them, but no one is safe from this devastating crime.

Mohammad Yasin (Bedford) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and making some good points. We are a nation of pet lovers, yet the law does not protect us from this destructive crime. It is a serious issue. Does my hon. Friend agree that losing a pet is like losing a family member, as thousands of people in this country think, and that we must stop equating the theft of a much-loved animal with the general theft of possession? They are clearly not the same. With pet theft increasing, it is time to toughen the legislation and sentencing, and put an end to this cruel and devastating crime.

Mike Hill: My hon. Friend goes to the heart of the problem. Hopefully, all those listening from a parliamentary perspective will join him in urging everybody to push for that outcome.

People do not steal pets to love them. They use them, abuse them and treat them like inanimate objects. There are many heartbreaking stories. Pepsi, a 12-year-old cat from my constituency of Hartlepool, was brutally killed by lampers. Zeena, a Staffordshire bull terrier, was stolen from her family and forced to fight for her life in a dog-fighting ring. She was reunited with her family, carrying the scars of appalling injuries, four years later. Ella, a terrier, was kicked so hard by a dog thief that she died from her injuries. Ivy, a cocker spaniel, was stolen from her home and found dead the next morning. She had been dumped by the side of a road, having suffered serious dog bites and bruising. Bentley, a cocker spaniel, was stolen from his bed in West Yorkshire with five other cocker spaniels. Bentley died, as thieves gouged out his microchip, leading to a brain infection. The other five spaniels remain missing. Kemo joined the whole family when Olly had cancer. With the love and support of Kemo, Olly was able to gain the strength to beat cancer. Kemo was stolen in February 2018 and remains missing. In all those cases, the thieves have not been apprehended.

Pet theft rips the heart out of families and wrecks lives. It also serves as a gateway to wider animal cruelty and extortion. Despite that, pet theft is currently seen as no different from the theft of an inanimate object. The theft of a labrador is treated like the theft of a laptop. Potential pet thieves are fast learning that the chance of ever being caught is tiny. Even if they are caught, the chance of a custodial sentence or a substantial fine is incredibly slim.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): If we are to catch the horrendous people who carry out this horrendous act, does my hon. Friend agree that enforcement needs to be at the top of the agenda? The law needs to be reformed, but we need enforcement of the laws, so that people are deterred from doing that sort of thing.

Mike Hill: Yes, absolutely, and I will come on to that point. SAMPA believes that pet theft reform can and must become a reality. According to Dogs Trust, under British law, pets are classed as property in theft-sentencing legislation. That means that stealing a pet is viewed in the same way as stealing an inanimate object.
Henry Smith ( Crawley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this important debate to the House. As many hon. Members have said, pets are part of people’s families. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in not only congratulating the Environment Secretary on increasing the sentence for animal cruelty to five years, which is important, but calling for the definition of animal cruelty to be extended to include the theft of much-loved pets?

Mike Hill: The hon. Gentleman makes a particularly relevant point. I agree that we must support any endeavour to improve legislation around animal cruelty.

The penalty for pet theft is based on the monetary value of the pets, not the emotional value to the owner. The 2015 theft offences guidelines classified the level of harm caused by theft into four categories. For the theft to be classified as category 1 or 2, the property stolen must have a value of over £500. Many pets have little or no monetary value, meaning that criminals stealing them are able to receive only minimal sentences in line with category 3 or 4. The maximum sentence for stealing a dog worth less than £500 is two years’ imprisonment.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I do not think my dogs would fetch more than 50 quid each. I am worried that we seem to be going backwards. In 1770, the Act preventing the stealing of dogs received Royal Assent. Anyone caught was fined or imprisoned or suffered hard labour—I think it was adjusted in 1846. The Theft Act 1968 seems to have removed the requirement to deal with people who steal dogs, which is a shame.

Mike Hill: The hon. Gentleman, as ever, makes a learned contribution—I appreciate the history.

Bob Stewart: Fifty quid.

Mike Hill: Fifty quid, indeed.

At present, the sentencing guidelines are such that it is hard to see a situation where a non-financially valuable pet can get out of category 4 and a prized pedigree can get out of category 3. That is clearly wrong. We should not tie the hands of the sentencing court by being prescriptive over value in cases such as pet theft. Where the theft of a family pet is involved, monetary value is irrelevant and should be disregarded.

We need tougher sentences. Since the 2016 revision to the sentencing guidelines, there has been no evidence that the courts have become any tougher on pet theft. Very few cases are getting to court. When they do, the guilty most often walk free. Some 98% of criminal cases are heard in magistrates courts, where sentencing for the theft of a pet can get out of category 3 and a prized pedigree can get out of category 4 and a prized pedigree can get out of category 3. That is clearly wrong. We should not tie the hands of the sentencing court by being prescriptive over value in cases such as pet theft. Where the theft of a family pet is involved, monetary value is irrelevant and should be disregarded.

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Bob Stewart: Fifty quid.

Mike Hill: Fifty quid, indeed.

At present, the sentencing guidelines are such that it is hard to see a situation where a non-financially valuable pet can get out of category 4 and a prized pedigree can get out of category 3. That is clearly wrong. We should not tie the hands of the sentencing court by being prescriptive over value in cases such as pet theft. Where the theft of a family pet is involved, monetary value is irrelevant and should be disregarded.

We need tougher sentences. Since the 2016 revision to the sentencing guidelines, there has been no evidence that the courts have become any tougher on pet theft. Very few cases are getting to court. When they do, the guilty most often walk free. Some 98% of criminal cases are heard in magistrates courts, where sentencing for pet theft is almost certainly below six months.

Dr Daniel Allen’s research has found that less than 5% of dog theft crimes lead to charges, which includes community orders. The often-cited seven-year maximum sentence has never been awarded for the theft of a pet and cannot be handed down specifically for the theft of a pet. Alongside that, microchipping dogs became compulsory across the UK in April 2016, but scanning remains optional.

Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the microchipping law was a missed opportunity? People who have their dogs microchipped are still not the legal owner, but simply the keeper of the pet. Maybe it is time for another debate on how we can improve the microchipping laws.

Mike Hill: I agree with my hon. Friend. That is a worthy subject for further debate.

In June 2018, a gang of four were tried at Lincoln Crown court following a burglary in Middle Rasen, Lincolnshire. Fifteen Cavalier King Charles spaniels were taken, including one that was pregnant. One of the dogs was later recovered on the side of a motorway, having been thrown from a moving vehicle. All four accused pleaded guilty to theft, but despite this being a serious case in the highest possible court, the gang members still received only suspended sentences. Two years earlier, five connected men had been sentenced in the same court to a total of 12 years in jail for conspiracy to steal railway cables. That sort of scrap metal theft used to be fashionable until the Government gave that crime a more serious consequence.

Our pets need improved protection, too. The revisions proposed by SAMP A would be so much simpler to achieve. SAMP A just wants to improve the existing legislation. SAMP A, Dogs Trust and others want the Government both to amend the Theft Act 1968 to reclassify the theft of pets as a specific crime in its own right and to improve the sentencing guidelines. Their suggestions for pet theft reforms are small and attainable, but those highly significant revisions would make the existing law much more appropriate for modern families and their pets. SAMP A wants to tweak section 4(4) of the 1968 Act, relating to property, to include a special mention of the theft of pet animals. It already details mushrooms and wild animals, so why not pets?

Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab): My hon. Friend is making a strong case. Does he agree that a tiny legislative change would have massively beneficial consequences and demonstrate that we are truly a nation of animal lovers?

Mike Hill: That is well said, and I agree wholeheartedly.

Although the word “property” understandably makes many pet owners uncomfortable, our pets would be better protected if they were properly detailed in the 1968 Act, because that would strengthen the aggravated sentence provision, as is already the case with vehicles and bicycles.

SAMP A would like the sentencing guidelines for theft offences to be reviewed so that the section on harm would read: “Harm is assessed by reference to the financial loss that results from the theft, except in cases involving the theft of a domestic pet, where financial or monetary value should be disregarded.”

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. Does he agree that, although the theft of ordinary possessions, such as jewellery, is distressing, it is nothing like the loss of an animal? The people who do this are trading in misery.

Mike Hill: That is true; the hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head in terms of the difference.

SAMP A asks the Minister to reclassify pet theft as a crime in its own right, as is the case with vehicles and bicycles, and to add aggravated sentence provision for pet theft, to give the courts extended discretion.
On sentencing consistency, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 is being revised to increase sentencing for animal cruelty, and it is in the public interest to do the same for pet theft. SAMP A wants those changes because it believes that being proactive, with tougher sentencing, will act as a deterrent and help to reduce pet theft.

As we have heard, this is clearly an all-party issue. More than 100,000 petitioners agree that we need pet theft reform to help to protect pets. Campaigners hope that the Minister will do the right thing and make pet theft reform a reality.

4.52 pm

Gareth Johnson (Dartford) (Con): I am pleased to be able to contribute to the debate. I pay tribute to the Petitions Committee and to the contribution of the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill).

We all agree that pet theft is a particularly nasty, cruel and growing crime that brings misery to owners and to dogs. I got involved with this issue when a case was brought to my attention of a lady who lived on her own and did not have any family members or friends in the local vicinity. She had a dog that was the centre of her world, and it was stolen from her. That caused her such misery, grief and devastation that trying to deal with it as some sort of property crime fell very wide of the mark. That is not how we should approach such incidents.

We have heard several comments about statistics. I have tried to drill down into how big a problem dog theft is in this country, but the brutal fact is that we simply do not know. We heard that 2,000 dogs are stolen per year, but I have also heard the figure of 4,000. We hear different things from different parts of the country, because different police forces approach it completely differently. Last year, I sent a freedom of information request to every police force in the country to try to ascertain how they approached it, and it was clear that in some areas, but not in others, a designated police officer dealt with any offence to do with pet theft.

In some police forces, when the police turned up to a complaint about a dog being stolen from someone’s garden, it was recorded as the theft of a dog, but in others it was recorded as a missing pet. Consequently, according to the statistics, the picture around the country is very varied. In fact, if the statistics show a high level of pet theft in an area, that often suggests only that the police force in that area is very proactive in dealing with it. I pay tribute to my county of Kent and the police force there, which does take the matter seriously. One in four stolen animals in Kent are returned to their owners. That is a pitifully small percentage, but it is far better than the national average, which is something like one in 10 stolen dogs being returned to their owners. We need to look carefully at the statistics, because the picture around the country is mixed.

It is something of an urban myth that most dogs are stolen from outside shops. Although that does happen, it seems that most dogs are stolen from people’s gardens or when they are taken out for walks; that is far more planned than the opportunistic theft of a dog from outside a shop. The different circumstances in which dogs are stolen also have an impact on the way that the statistics are compiled. If a police officer is called to someone’s home, that will often be treated as the theft of a dog. If a dog is out on a walk and is taken by somebody, it is treated as a missing dog. There is a disparity of approach in different forces.

Some forces deal with the matter particularly well. South Wales can be very proud, and Norfolk deals with the issue proactively. We should give credit to forces that are desperately trying to get to grips with the growing problem. However, as much as some police forces are trying to do their best for dogs and their owners and deal with the issue, they are hampered in their effectiveness by the fact that the courts cannot deal with it properly. The courts are hampered, in turn, by the Sentencing Council guidelines that they have to follow, which have been mentioned a few times already.

The courts’ inability to deal adequately with dog theft is at the root of so much of the problem, and it is not surprising that many people see dog theft as an attractive, low-risk crime. I worked in the criminal justice system for about 20 years before coming to this place, and I saw an increasing propensity for people to commit such offences. The offences chop and change; the hon. Member for Hartlepool mentioned metal theft, and other crimes that are seen as high reward and low risk gain popularity among the criminal classes. At the moment, this country is suffering because criminals see dog theft as an attractive crime. It is incumbent on this place to stop that. If we do not act, the problem will simply get worse.

The category of the offence is at the heart of how a court deals with an offender, as we heard earlier. The guidelines say that if an animal—or anything—that is taken has a value of less than £500, it is very difficult for the court to give a custodial sentence. If a court does give a custodial sentence, it has to be short, because that is what the guidelines demand. Time and again, we hear from the Government—not just this one, but Governments of all persuasions, including the coalition Government and the last Labour Government—that seven years’ imprisonment is available for the theft of a dog. That may be the case on paper, but the guidelines make it impossible for the courts to impose that kind of sentence.

I call on the Sentencing Council to look at that. I wrote to it last year and said that it needed to amend its guidelines to make appropriate and adequate sentences available for this kind of offence. It wrote back and simply said no, it was not going to. We need to change its mind and ensure that it is sentencing this kind of offence in accordance with the actual nature of the crime. The monetary value of a dog should not be the main factor in sentencing an offender, and get that exactly right is under the current guidelines. A sentence of seven years for a dog thief is not available to the courts, as the guidelines stand. That is crystal clear, so we should not allow anybody to hide behind that figure of seven years.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend’s contribution. It strikes me that the element that we are not really accounting for is that dogs themselves may be worth less than five hundred quid, but their breeding potential may be worth several thousand pounds over a period of time. I wonder whether the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 has an application in this area that has not yet been properly used.
are priceless to us and the law does not recognise that.

Bob Stewart: Less.

Gareth Johnson: If I understand my hon. Friend’s point, the Proceeds of Crime Act is fine when there are some proceeds, but when there are no proceeds, it is very difficult to use. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) mentioned that his dogs are worth about £50 each.

Gareth Johnson: My dogs are not worth 50p each, but that is not the point. The whole point is that our pets are priceless to us and the law does not recognise that.

Simon Hart: Their offspring, however, might be worth more; that is my point. My hon. Friend might have a dog that is borderline £500 in value, but if, unfortunately, it had more than one litter a year—some unscrupulous breeders of dogs do that—for a period of years, its value to a breeder would be significant.

Gareth Johnson: Without going into details, if my dog had offspring it would be something of a miracle, so it would be worth an awful lot of money. My hon. Friend makes a very pertinent point, however. Some people steal dogs to use them for breeding and therefore make lots of money for themselves, as the puppies are sold on. We have seen a particular increase in thefts of French bulldogs, because they are high-value dogs. I suppose the difference in that case, and in the case of some sheepdogs that we have heard mention of, is that because there is a reasonable monetary value attached to the dog, the court has some teeth to deal with the matter. It does not when the theft is of a scruffy mongrel—a mutt—that is a member of a family, and is loved to bits and priceless to that family, but is of a pitiful monetary value. That is where we have problems with the current guidelines, and where we completely fall short.

At the moment, the Sentencing Council may not be giving a green light to dog thieves, but it is certainly not putting up a red light. It has to change, therefore, and if it does not, the only way forward for this place is to bring in a specific offence of dog theft. We have specific offences such as the theft of a pedal cycle, and various other things, but we do not have a specific offence of dog theft. If the Sentencing Council does not change its guidelines, it would be right and appropriate to bring in a law that tackles this particular problem.

This is an issue that unites this House; there is no party politics here. Members of the Labour party, Liberal Democrats and Members from all political parties are united in our condemnation of, and our attitude of disgust towards, people who carry out such crimes. We all want to see a change. I hope that we will get that through the Sentencing Council, but if we do not, the route is through the Ministry of Justice. I will be interested to hear what the Minister has to say about this matter today.

Finally, I pay tribute to all the organisations—I will not repeat the list that the hon. Member for Hartlepool read out earlier—that have worked so tirelessly on this important issue. I particularly pay tribute to the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance. I know that some of its representatives are here, and that it has worked incredibly hard on this issue and tried to keep it in the public eye. This offence is a nasty, cruel one that brings misery to owners and to dogs. It is not a property crime, and it should not be treated as such.

Hugh Gaffney (Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak. It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Sharma, and to serve under you this afternoon.

I start by paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for an important speech. I agreed with his speech in full, and I hope that Dr Daniel Allen—the creator of this public petition—and all who love their animals feel the same way.

Millions of people and families from across the country—in Scotland, Wales, England and Northern Ireland—own pets of many kinds. In June 2017, I was elected Member of Parliament for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill. It was an important moment for me and for my family, but I can assure everyone present that it was not the only important matter for us last year. We got a new dog—I was replaced by a dog called Mia, who joined our family. If my wife Anne was asked, I think she would say that Mia coming to us was more important than me coming to this House.

After so many weeks down here in Parliament, it could be said that in the eyes of the Gaffney family, Mia has indeed replaced me in our home back in Scotland. She certainly spends more time in my bed than I do. Like many Members from across the House, I could share many stories of my dog’s cheeky but loving behaviour, and about her determination to take my side of the bed and establish herself as the top dog in our house.

It is easy for me to have fun and laugh with my dog—she has certainly given me a lot of pleasure—but other people experience the heartache of losing their animals or having them stolen. I pay tribute to the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance for the important work that it does to champion the rights of animal lovers, and indeed the rights of the animals themselves. I echo the words of Beverley Cuddy, the patron of SAMPA, who said:

“Pets are priceless, irreplaceable and their loss wrecks lives”.

Beverley is right and she gives voice to the feelings of so many people. I add my support to ensure that all our voices are heard here today in Parliament.

The fact that only one in five stolen dogs tends to be recovered is a disgrace, and it means that many families and other dog owners will never receive the closure that they need and demand after the loss of a pet. We must do more, and we must do better. There is no doubt that crime is on the rise in this country, whatever we may hear from the Home Office, and not just conventional sorts of crime. Pet theft is also on the rise, and we can see why.

Fiona Onasanya: In my constituency of Peterborough, I was made aware in the area of Ravensthorpe of dog snatchers going round to houses and painting the fences red to alert their accomplices to the fact that there was a pet there. Does my hon. Friend agree that pet theft is becoming a type of organised crime and that it needs to be treated as such?

Hugh Gaffney: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, and I certainly agree with her. That is the problem—pet theft is profitable. Pet theft is easy, particularly when people are in the parks with their animals, or, in this type of weather, when doors and windows are left open.
open and dogs escape, never to be found again. Pet theft is not being taken seriously by our law enforcement agencies, and we need to improve in that regard. Because the Government have yet to demonstrate their determination to tackle pet theft once and for all, we must do more.

A number of my constituents have been in touch with me about this debate and, indeed, signed the petition that we are considering. My commitment to them, to all animal lovers and to their animals is that I will do all I can to make sure that we in Parliament show criminals that we will not let them get away with pet theft. We are after them for our animals.

5.7 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): It really is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Sharma.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill), as well as to the Petitions Committee, for taking this issue forward. I also pay a heartfelt tribute to Dr Daniel Allen, who started this petition and who is in the Gallery today, and to all those campaigners who have worked so tirelessly to move this issue right up the political agenda, such as the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance, Pet Theft Awareness, DogLost, Beverley Cuddy, Marc Abraham, Debbie Matthews, Professor John Cooper, QC, and many, many more—in fact, too many to name. It is due to all their outstanding efforts that more than 100,000 people across the United Kingdom, including more than 70 in my constituency, have signed the petition. Having this important debate here today is a real triumph of people power.

When I am asked what the most difficult part of my job as an MP is, I always answer: “Monday mornings.” That is not because I hate having to roll out of bed to catch a 7.15 am flight, but because it breaks my heart every Monday morning to leave my Jack Russell-Yorkshire terrier cross, Poppy. The fact that she knows I am leaving and does her utmost to make me feel guilty about it just makes heading to London so much harder. I could not imagine ever returning home to find that Poppy was not there. I do not even want to contemplate the phone could have been replaced within 24 hours, to get Angel back. She took unpaid leave from work in December 2013. She spent more than £13,000 trying to get Angel back. She took unpaid leave from work and did her utmost to make me feel guilty about it just makes heading to London so much harder. I could not imagine ever returning home to find that Poppy was not there. I do not even want to contemplate the notion of her being stolen. For me, like millions of other pet owners across the UK, Poppy is my family. To be honest, I am like a proud dad. She has her moments, she can be relentless with her ball and her ducky, but I love her to bits, and I would hate anything it if were to happen to her. Our pets are much more than just other objects, no matter how expensive, a pet is a living animal and a much-loved part of the family. To underscore how truly awful, heartbreaking and simply devastating a crime pet theft can be.

Fiona Onasanya: The hon. Gentleman is making a passionate, moving point. Does he agree that this is not just about pets? This is about a life and about a family’s life. The law needs to bear that in mind. This is not about monetary value, but about a life being taken. If a child was taken, we would not say, “They are only a couple of years old, so we think they are not worth that much.” This is a life, and it matters to the family.

Ross Thomson: I could not agree with the hon. Lady more. We have a real emotional connection to our pets, just as we have that emotional connection to members of the family. When we lose family members, we grieve; when we lose our pets, we grieve in the same way, and it should be treated in the same way.

As it stands, our law does not take true account of the real value of our pets. As the law stands, our pets are not inherently considered any different from inanimate objects. Sentencing is based predominantly on the financial loss to the victim. In England and Wales, for example, the theft of a dog valued at less than £500 must be classed as category 3 or 4. Those are lower categories, which mean lighter sentences.

Unfortunately, the Sentencing Council’s 2016 reforms have not made English and Welsh courts tougher on pet thieves. Very few cases of pet theft are getting to court, and even when they do, too many pet thieves are walking free or being given light-touch sentences. Given that pets are stolen not to be given a warm and loving home, but to be abused, tortured and treated as disposable, the current state of affairs simply makes my blood boil.

In Scotland, the Scottish Sentencing Council has not put forward any guidelines on theft, so judges rely on case law to decide on sentencing for pet theft. That flexibility cuts both ways. While some sentences may accurately reflect the real emotional harm done to the victim, that is far from guaranteed. The problem with the law as it stands is, as any victim would say, that pet theft is fundamentally not about financial loss. The value of a pet to its owners is far greater than any financial valuation could quantify. Losing a much-loved pet—a member of the family—can tear the heart out of that family and be as devastating a loss as losing any other family member.

Unlike a laptop, a blender, a flat-screen TV or any other object, no matter how expensive, a pet is a living animal and a much-loved part of the family. To underscore just how devastating the loss of a pet can be, a growing number of companies now offer bereavement leave to employees who have lost a pet. Inanimate possessions just do not compare, and it is about time that was properly recognised in the law.

Pet theft can and does cause real harm to victims’ lives. Just ask Dawn Maw, whose dog Angel was stolen in December 2013. She spent more than £13,000 trying to get Angel back. She took unpaid leave from work and suffered depression and the breakdown of her marriage. Pet theft changed Dawn’s life. She has said that her phone might have cost the same as Angel, but the phone could have been replaced within 24 hours, and Angel was her best friend.

Another example is Rita and Philip Potter, whose labrador Daisy vanished from their back garden in Norfolk eight months ago. The family are devastated and fear that Daisy was taken to be sold on the black market. Rita said that Daisy was “a beautiful dog, she was a wonderful companion. We have got seven grandchildren, and they all miss her so much. At Christmas time, our little granddaughter, who is just five years old, said all she wanted for Christmas was Daisy back home.”

Such cases are powerful and demonstrate so clearly why the current law makes no sense. The light sentences given to so many pet thieves, based simply on the financial value of the pet, are an added insult to victims. They do not reflect the harm caused and do not act as an effective deterrent. It is just not justice. We need to change the law to make pet theft a serious criminal
offence in its own right, punishable at a level more appropriate to the deep emotional harm caused to the victims.

That is what I intend to achieve with the ten-minute rule Bill I will be proud to bring before this House tomorrow. My hope is that the Bill will bring much-needed change to the law in not only England and Wales but Scotland. As a Scottish MP, I am determined to ensure that Scotland is not left behind, by working with the Scottish Parliament, and particularly my colleague Maurice Golden MSP. I hope the Bill can deliver justice for pet owners in Scotland, too.

For too long, too many pet owners have gone through the absolute hell and misery that pet theft can cause, and too many pet thieves have got away with a mere slap on the wrist. That is unacceptable, and it is time for change. The petition is a great example of people coming together to change a real flaw in our criminal justice system, and I hope that, this week, this debate and my ten-minute rule Bill can be the start of the change we need to see.

5.16 pm

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I thank the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) for securing this debate and the Petitions Committee for tabling it. The petition, which was started by the Stolen and Missing Pets Alliance, has secured more than 100,000 signatures. That has led to this debate this afternoon. The petition will remain open until 8 August, if memory serves.

In the UK, approximately 2,000 dogs are stolen each year. Only a very small number are returned to their owners, and we do not know whether 2,000 is the true figure. We do not know whether the dogs have been stolen or simply got lost, and we do not know how many go missing and are not reported, so the figure may be a vast underestimate.

Only 5% of reported dog thefts lead to a conviction, which is a very low rate. Charges may be brought under the Theft Act 1968 or the Animal Welfare Act 2006. In Scotland, charges can be brought under common law or the Animal Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006.

There have been numerous calls for pet theft to be classified as a specific crime, with pets recognised as sentient beings, rather than simply property. According to Dogs Trust, 70% of reported dog thefts are not from outside shops or from cars, but from owners’ gardens—the crime starts with the disturbing invasion of a person’s private property. People have a close affinity with their pets, which means that when a pet is abruptly taken, people also suffer considerable emotional distress and trauma, and that applies to all the family.

It is not easy to grieve for a lost pet. We had a wee fella for 17 years. As a big robust firefighter, I took him to the vet on his last day, and I cried for an hour. I know what it is like to lose not just a pet, but a best pal. If I was bad, my wife was significantly worse. I do not think she will shed as many tears when I go. Pets are very much a part of our lives.

Each case should undoubtedly be looked at on its own merits, but the sentencing should always be appropriate to the crime and reflect the emotional distress caused to the pet owner. Too often, sentencing guidelines concentrate on the purchase or replacement value of the dog or pet. That is discriminatory, because the value of a mongrel or non-pedigree as a person’s best friend may equate to or exceed that of the purchase price of a pedigree breed. The value is in fun, friendship and unquestioning loyalty.

We have to recognise what was said in a recent article in the Cumbrock Chronicle, a small local paper whose circulation covers my constituency:

“Thiefs of French Bulldogs—a distinctive breed popular with celebrities...increased 27% from 2016-2017...The number of Chihuahuas”—as mentioned before—

“and Huskies taken from their owners is also on the rise, with 57 and 18 stolen in 2017 respectively.”

That trend appears to be borne out by information published by insurance companies.

An older media report in a national newspaper records a Lhasa Apso puppy—it must have a Tibetan connection with a name like that—stolen in my hometown of Ayr. The police investigating at the time appear to have discovered coloured stickers on local garden gateposts—that was identified by the hon. Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya). They suspected the thieves may have had a coding system for stealing dogs to order for sale, breeding or fighting—or, in some cases, I am sure, for ransom.

It is certainly widely felt among the public that the current levels of fine available to members of the judiciary to impose are insufficient, particularly given the apparent reluctance to impose a custodial sentence in such cases. In the meantime, while we await much-needed amendments to the law, I trust that the existing laws will be rigorously enforced to protect our family pets, and I hope that the procurator fiscal in Scotland will process cases of pet theft—it is so important that that message goes to the organised gangs of criminals who steal family pets for personal gain, because it is an easy crime, as has been said before. Finally, I ask that pet owners remain vigilant in relation to the very real risk of losing their pet to pet theft.

5.21 pm

Giles Watling (Clacton) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship today, Mr Sharma.

Back in the early 1990s I was involved in breaking up a puppy farming ring in Wales—I got involved with a national newspaper—and I saw that the animals were kept in appalling conditions. The puppies were sold at motorway service stations. More recently I went out with the RSPCA in one of my local little towns, Jaywick, and we looked at various places where dogs were being mistreated—not necessarily through deliberate cruelty, but through ignorance, a lot of the time. It really is extraordinary that we sometimes call ourselves an animal-loving country.

It is a great honour to stand here today and represent the 168 people from Clacton who signed the petition. As I have said before, the theft of pets, and especially dogs, happens all too frequently in my constituency. In one case, two French bulldog puppies, Oswald and Dukka, were stolen from their house in Eton Road in Clacton. The puppies were eventually reunited with their owner, which is a rare good news story, but that was only after a Facebook campaign that got 2,500 visits, and I reckon the puppies must have become too hot.
to handle. However, when they were returned, they were
distressed. According to the owner, they were clearly
starving and not in good condition.

Bob Stewart: So far, we have not actually looked at
the problem from the point of view of the dogs. Dogs
have feelings, too. It must be bloody awful for a dog to
go from a really loving home to the barbarous places
where they are put.

Giles Watling: I did detect a sort of question there. I
totally agree with my hon. Friend that dogs have feelings
and stealing them is barbarous. I have dogs myself.
I have cavalier poodle bichon crosses—all right, they
are mongrels. They are part of my family and the
thought of losing one of them really distresses me,
which is why I want to combat pet theft. It is terribly
important. I raised my concerns with the Minister during
a debate on rural crime in the main Chamber, and I
asked for more information on what the Government
intend to do about the issue. Unfortunately, that information
was not forthcoming, so I hope to elicit a better response
today from the Minister; I say that very nicely.

The matter is important, and the current application
of the law surrounding pet theft is ineffective and
should be changed to make the monetary value of the
pet irrelevant, which will ensure that all criminals are
prosecuted and sentenced to the full extent of the law.
As we know, 105,968 people signed the petition, and
97% of respondents to a “Dogs Today” survey support
the proposal and agree that all pet theft should be
treated equally, regardless of the animal’s initial monetary
value. There is clearly a great deal of public support for
a change, and I ask the Minister to bear that in mind as
we move forward.

I also ask the Minister to bear in mind something
that has been said many times this afternoon, but that is
worth reiterating: pet theft is cruel. It is cruel to the
owners who are left bereft after the loss of a friend, a
loved one and a member of the family, and it is cruel to
the animal itself, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the
Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart). The animal can
be mistreated or even, as we have heard—it is horrific—have
its microchip cut out of its neck without anaesthetic to
avoid detection.

The Government’s current position needs to evolve
and take account of the strong public sentiment and the
cripul impact that pet theft has on those involved. I have
no doubt that I will be reassured that laws are already in
place to deal firmly with offenders who commit such
crimes. To expand on that point further, and as I am
sure we are all aware, the theft of a pet is already a
criminal offence under the Theft Act 1968.

Fiona Onasanya: The hon. Gentleman has made such
a good point. I want to highlight something that I hope
the Minister will cover. The lower the category, the
lower the sentence, with little in the way of repercussions.
That makes the crime even more attractive because it is
low risk and high reward, so that needs to be borne in
mind when looking at sentencing.

Giles Watling: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention.
I could not agree more. I am coming on to the question
of low risk and high reward, which makes the crime
attractive because the risk is so low but some of the
animals can be worth a great deal. Indeed, they are
stolen to breed from, and therefore the rewards are
multiplied by however many puppies they have. The
maximum penalty at the moment is seven years’
imprisonment, and it very rarely, if ever, gets imposed.

The guidelines take account of the emotional distress
and therefore the harm that the theft of personal items
such as a pet can have on the victim, and they recommend
higher penalties for such offences. However, although I
welcome such developments, I am uneasy about the
current position for various reasons. First, as the Stolen
and Missing Pets Alliance—SAMPA—tells us, the seven-
year maximum sentence has never been awarded, so,
out of the 646 reported incidences of pet theft in 2017,
there were no cases where that sentence was applied.
That is because the penalty for pet theft is often decided
based on the monetary value of the pet, as we have
heard this afternoon. Many pets have little or no monetary
value, although in the eyes of their owner, as we have
said, they are priceless. However, in the eyes of the
court, that value does not exist. The courts deal only in
monetary terms, and the most severe sentence recommended
for stealing a pet that is worth less than £500 is two years
rather than seven.

My second point of contention is that in the past
three years dog theft has increased by 24%, which
demonstrates that the sentencing guidelines are clearly
not working and are not a deterrent to potential pet
thieves. To demonstrate that point further, between
2015 and 2018, 96.75% of dog thefts ended without
charge, showing that the courts have not become tougher
on this particular aspect of pet theft. Additionally, I
have heard from SAMPA that the police are reluctant to
record pet theft because it negatively affects their crime
figures. That explains why cases of pet theft are rarely
investigated, and why the few cases that do make it to
court do not result in a conviction. Potential criminals
know that the chance of getting caught or ever receiving
punishment is, as we said earlier, very slim, so the crime
is low risk.

My third concern is the reliance on microchipping,
which does not address the issue. Microchips can be
counterfeit, meaning that stolen dogs can be easily
moved on rather than reunited with their owner, as the
Government suggest. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier,
the chips can simply be cut out, causing great distress to
the animal. As a result, I believe we must address that
particular issue and improve security compliance on the
microchip database. Also, we should complement the
microchipping regime with a new dog registration regime,
and I will be bringing forward legislation to reintroduce
that here in England in due course.

Bob Stewart: Our financially worthless, indolent dogs
are each microchipped. They also have their own passports,
with photographs. My wife owns them and controls
them, which is more than I can do. Does my hon.
Friend agree that the passport system could be used to
help to trace dogs when they are stolen?

Giles Watling: That is indeed a possibility. The legislation
that I intend to introduce will provide for a reintroduction
of the licensing system, so that we know where all the
dogs are, who owns them and how they are being looked
after, so we can have some grasp on animal cruelty.
Like Dogs Trust, I am troubled by the decision to equate animals with property, as the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) mentioned. That decision means that we are denying animals the right to be considered sentient beings. The Government’s current position seems to mean that pets derive their sentience only from being in the possession of their owner, given that when they are wrongly separated they become property for the duration of the prosecution and are therefore exempt from the Government’s promise to ensure that their welfare is protected. That must change.

All animals are sentient, regardless of their location or continuation of legitimate ownership. As the draft Animal Welfare (Sentencing and Recognition of Sentience) Bill sets out, the Government “must have regard to the welfare needs of animals as sentient beings in formulating and implementing government policy.” Accordingly, the Government must recognise that their current position does not protect the welfare of sentient animals when they are stolen, and the sentencing guidelines for pet theft must be changed to move us closer to a position where their welfare can always be assured.

I maintain that the current position is not working. It does not deter or limit pet theft; in fact, I would argue that pet theft is getting worse. Pet theft should be identified as a separate criminal activity and be covered by its own law.

5.31 pm

Dr Lisa Cameron (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (SNP): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma, especially having worked with you on the Select Committee on International Development, where you have done so much on human rights over the years.

It is also a pleasure to speak on the petition. As has been mentioned, it has received overwhelming public support, because it is an issue that is very dear to the hearts and minds of people right across the United Kingdom. I thank Dr Daniel Allen and Beverley Cuddy for getting it to this stage, and I look forward to hosting them at some point in the near future in the all-party parliamentary dog advisory welfare group, which I chair.

We have been doing lots of good work on dog welfare in the year since the group was formed. I encourage hon. Members to join the group. It is very much a cross-party group, because animal welfare is one of those issues on which we come together and work together to ensure that we have the very best conditions right across the United Kingdom.

The petition secured more than 100,000 signatures, and has been supported by the Stolen And Missing Pets Alliance, All About Animals, APDAWG—our all-party group—Finn’s law campaigners and Lucy’s law campaigners including Marc Abraham, known as “Marc the Vet”, the National Animal Welfare Trust, magazines including Dogs Today and Dogs Monthly, and celebrities including Ricky Gervais, Chris Packham, Kirsty Gallacher, Peter Egan, who regularly attends our cross-party group, Victoria Stilwell and Lorraine Kelly. Most of all, the petition has the power of people behind it. It has the power of our constituents, and I am very proud that more than 100 of my constituents from East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow felt so strongly that they wanted to sign the petition and have urged me to speak on this important issue.

Hugh Gaffney: I want to make a wee point. Last week, dangerous dogs were in the news, and 2,275 postal workers were bitten last year. I would just like to say that the majority of postal workers, like myself, love animals and dogs, and welcome them.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am aware of his history in the postal service and thank him greatly for that. It is one of the great services that we have across the country. There are some risks to postal workers from dogs, so it is incumbent on dog owners to ensure that their dogs are trained appropriately. I realise that postal workers have an affinity for dogs, like the rest of our constituents and people across the country.

As we have heard, a quarter of households have one or more dogs, and it appears that this crime is on the rise. I ask the Minister whether we know why that might be happening, and what the factors are. Only when we discover the key factors behind this crime will we be able to have a multi-structural strategy to address what is happening. Are dogs being stolen for heinous crimes such as dog fighting, as we have heard today? Are those poor dogs being savaged, perhaps as bait for dogs that are being trained to fight in a ring? We need far more resources to tackle that. I was extremely proud to lead a debate in Westminster Hall, only in 2016, on dog fighting.

Is there a gang element to pet theft? Is the same type of organised crime set-up that we see in relation to dog fighting, puppy smuggling and puppy farming causing pets to be stolen? If there are links between those activities, and between the people perpetrating them, we need to develop adequate laws and legal frameworks to deal with that. Lucy’s law is also important for many reasons, including dog welfare and people’s welfare, in terms of having dogs and young puppies enter families, and in relation to the types of issues that we are discussing today. I feel that there may be an important underlying common denominator that it is important to address.

People have spoken today of their love for dogs. My dog, Rossi, is a French bulldog. Having looked at the figures for pet theft, I am aware that that is exactly the type of dog breed that is being stolen—it is near the top of the list. French bulldogs are often used for breeding and puppy farming, which makes me think that perhaps there are links with pet theft. I would be bereft if something happened to Rossi out in the garden where he likes to roam. We are lucky to have quite a big garden. I keep encouraging my husband to cut the grass, and I am hopeful that he might be doing that today as we speak, but Rossi loves to wander throughout our garden. It is always in the back of my mind to check that he is still there and that everything is okay.

Giles Watling: Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to get the information out to owners to protect their pets? Humphrey, Herbert and Minnie wander as well. I do not know where they are half the time. We need to take measures and be aware.

Dr Cameron: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Much of this is about education. Our garden is enclosed, but we are mindful of the fact that if someone were intent on stealing our pet that would not
prevent them from doing so. I am aware of the breed-specific snatching of French bulldogs, so it is a particular worry for my family.

From listening to the figures, pet theft seems to be a crime that goes unpunished and has very little consequence for those who engage in it. That has to be addressed, and I urge the Minister to make a change in law. We are a nation of dog lovers, and addressing this issue will minimise the impact on families who lose a pet and on the children. My children would be absolutely devastated to lose Rossi. As the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) said, there is a severe impact on the stolen dog, too, because often they do not go to a happy home. I do not want to think about their fate, given the activities that the criminal gangs may be involved in.

Another issue that has been raised is the impact on elderly people, for whom a pet can be very important. If they live on their own, a pet can be an absolute lifeline and can make them feel that they have a connection. We must consider that, for someone in such circumstances, losing a dog or any other pet is a bereavement—it causes grief and trauma. We know from the meetings of the all-party group for dog welfare just how important dogs, cats and pets in general are in tackling loneliness. The Government have set out to address that issue, so I ask the Minister to look at pet therapy and contact with pets within that framework.

It is extremely busy in Westminster Hall, despite the fact that we are all on a one-line Whip, because this issue resonates with the public, MPs and our constituents. There is no party politics when it comes to animal welfare, as we all want to see change. Members from many parties have spoken today, and I thank them for that. Several Members who support the dog welfare group could not be here today but very much wanted to come.

The hon. Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) spoke about his little dog, Mia, and her importance, if not primacy, in the family now that he is down at Westminster. I wish Mia and the family well.

This is a devolved issue, and I have written to the Scottish Government about it because they have to be reviewed. My colleagues, Emma Harper and Christine Grahame, are linked to the cross-party animal welfare group in the Scottish Parliament, and I hope that they will take this issue forward. The First Minister knows I am extremely dogmatic in insisting we take the lead on these issues, which must be addressed across the United Kingdom.

I urge the Minister to discuss the legal framework—particularly the fact that cases are not coming to court, they do not appear even to be recorded, and weak sentencing is not acting as a deterrent. Obviously, pets mean much more to us than objects, so that is one of the issues that must be addressed in the law. Some of the ideas that hon. Members suggested as part of the solution, such as licencing and passporting systems, are good, but I want the Minister to address the precipitating factors that have caused the increase in dog thefts across the country. Are they linked to other animal welfare issues, such as puppy smuggling and farming, and dog fighting?

Sue Hayman (Workington) (Lab): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Sharma. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on introducing this important debate. I thank the organisers of the petition and the 105,000 people who signed it. The parliamentary e-petition system is a fantastic way of connecting us with our constituents on the issues that are really important to us and of putting such issues on the agenda.

We are clearly a nation of animal lovers. I declare an interest, as the owner of a dog and a cat. Many hon. Members have shared their experience of their pets. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) for his contribution. He said it is a real disgrace that so few stolen pets are ever reunited with their owners. The hon. Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson) is clearly very knowledgeable about this issue and made a particularly powerful point about sentencing guidelines. My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya) made some very important interventions, which added significantly to the debate. I was particularly pleased to hear the story the hon. Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) told about how his dog, Poppy, reacts when he leaves to come down here—like other hon. Members, I could share similar stories. I congratulate him on his ten-minute rule Bill, and I wish him luck with it in the House tomorrow.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) talked about the huge impact that the loss of a much-loved pet can have on a family. The hon. Member for Clacton (Giles Watling) talked about the cruelty of pet theft, not just to the family who lost the pet but to the pet itself. It is important that we do not forget that. The hon. Member for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron) works tirelessly on dog welfare in this House and made an important contribution.

As pet owners, we truly love our animals. Figures from Dogs Trust show that 99% of pet owners consider their animal to be part of the family—we all do. We have heard that the bond between an animal and its family is linked to the bond between a parent and their child, so it is clearly a terrible nightmare for a family if their dog or cat is stolen.

More than 60 dogs are stolen across England and Wales every single week. That is 60 families whose beloved pets are taken. Disgracefully, fewer than 5% of cases end in convictions. We do not want that situation to be allowed to continue. As Members of the House, it is our duty to try to do something about it.

Battersea Dogs & Cats Home told me that there is no single database of pet-related theft, so any information comes from freedom of information requests to individual police forces—the hon. Member for Dartford made that point clearly. Will the Minister tell us how we can tackle this problem if we do not know the scale of it? I understand the concerns raised about categorising pets in legislation designed to deal with property theft. As hon. Members said, it is important that we recognise in law that animals are sentient beings and not the equivalent of a laptop or a blender.

Tragically, on average, five dogs a day are stolen and then sold, bred or forced to fight. We have heard that the numbers are increasing; my hon. Friend the Member...
for Hartlepool gave us some clear figures and information about that. We have also heard that designer dogs such as cockapoos or French bulldogs sell for a high price, and that Staffordshire bull terriers are often stolen for dog fighting. It is thought that the lack of prosecution and the lenient punishments are contributing to this rise. Pet theft offenders receive community service orders or a fine more often than a custodial sentence—certainly not the seven years that could be handed out.

It is heartbreaking that so few pets are reunited with their owners. Some breeds are more likely to be stolen. Labrador thefts are up 42% year on year; as the owner of a beautiful chocolate labrador called Max, I find that horrifying. The thought of losing Max is dreadful. He is six, but one of the first things we did when we got him as a puppy was to insure him, because we were advised that he was at high risk of being stolen. That is a terrible thing to have to contemplate.

I appreciate what the Government have said about updating sentencing guidelines for theft offences to account for the emotional stress caused by pet theft, and I understand that the guidelines now recommend high penalties in such cases. As hon. Members have said today, however, we need to ensure that the proper sentences are given and that prosecutions are increased.

We must catch as many perpetrators as possible to do our best to stamp out this appalling crime, which causes such terrible upset to families.

On microchipping, it is welcome that the Government now require all dogs to be microchipped and registered by the age of eight weeks. That does not solve the problem—we have heard that microchips can be dug out—but it has already had a positive impact.

Bob Stewart: Will the hon. Lady join me in asking the Minister whether we ought to look again at licensing dogs? That used to happen when I was a boy—when the world was black and white, of course.

Sue Hayman: I remember going with my mother to the post office to get a licence for our dalmatian—I was only a small child, obviously. We ought to look at anything that might help, so licensing clearly needs to be looked at; if it can help solve this crime, it is an important part of the picture.

The Labour party is committed to promoting the highest level of care for domestic animals. Recently, our animal welfare plan was out for consultation until the end of May, and it included a proposal to expand microchipping to cats, which at the moment do not have to be chipped. Is that something that the Government will consider seriously? Our manifesto also pledged an end to the third-party sale of puppies. Is that something that the Government will consider?

The Labour party manifesto, on which my colleagues and I were elected last year, stated:

“Domestic animals require stronger protection from cruelty.”

It also set out a “vision...for the UK to lead the world with high animal welfare standards in the wild, in farming and for domestic animals.”

That is something we stand by today and, from the clear cross-party support in this debate, hon. Members right across the House would also back strengthening the law in this area. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

The petition and today’s excellent debate have raised really important issues across the board, giving us all a lot to think about in terms of what needs to be done. The Labour party manifesto, on which my colleagues and I were elected last year, stated:

“Domestic animals require stronger protection from cruelty.”

It also set out a “vision...for the UK to lead the world with high animal welfare standards in the wild, in farming and for domestic animals.”

That is something we stand by today and, from the clear cross-party support in this debate, hon. Members right across the House would also back strengthening the law in this area. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s response.

5.52 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) on the way in which he introduced the debate.

As with every debate on animal welfare issues, it is one that is incredibly important to the public. This petition has more than 100,000 signatories—106,000, I am told—and today we have heard some heart-rending stories of individual cases from many Members’ constituencies, including from my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Gareth Johnson)and for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson). The hon. Member for Hartlepool talked about some horrific cases of pets being stolen to be used, in effect, for baiting in dog fighting or to fight themselves. That is clearly the cruellest and most extreme end of this heinous crime.

When I was about 13, we had a beautiful young golden retriever called Sam. When he was about a year old, he went missing. To this day, I can remember us going out on the roads late at night, driving down every country lane around the farm in Cornwall and trying to locate Sam, all to no avail. We were unable to sleep that night because we were so distraught and upset that our wonderfully kind pet dog had gone missing.

The following day, we phoned every farmer in the area, in case Sam had gone on a runabout, and we phoned all sorts of other businesses in case we could locate him. As luck would have it, a local scrap-metal dealer phoned my mother back about an hour after they had spoken to say that there was a van at the scrapyard with a white-coloured golden retriever that might be our dog. My mother rushed off to the scrapyard with a white-coloured golden retriever who undertook to keep the person occupied so that the van did not disappear. It was indeed our pet dog Sam, and my mother and our family were reunited with him.

The person who took Sam claimed that he had found him and had intended to take him to the police. It was therefore thought that we would not have a case and would not be able to bring a prosecution against the person, although that gentleman certainly had to endure a dressing down from my mother—a significant penalty.

I shall return to the issue of pet theft, but first I shall say a bit more about what the Government are doing to improve animal welfare specifically for pets. We have introduced new licensing requirements for puppy breeders, lowering the threshold at which they need a licence to breed pets. We have also strengthened the provisions on online sales, beyond any doubt bringing those who sell...
George Eustice: There has been an increase in pet theft of some breeds in recent years. Does analysis of the breeds that are being stolen offer any insight into the reasons, and therefore how we can best tackle this crime?

George Eustice: The hon. Lady asked a similar question about what is driving the thefts. At one end of the scale, there are horrific examples of pets being stolen to be used in baiting and dog fights. This afternoon, I asked our police lead on dogs whether they considered that to be a large factor in dog thefts. His response was that generally speaking, as with lots of theft, dogs that are perceived to have a higher monetary value tend to be stolen. Obviously, that is bad news for pets that are deemed to be of high worth, but on one level it is reassuring—hopefully, the type of incidents that the hon. Member for Hartlepool described are the exception rather than the rule in this terrible crime. I will return to the data a little later.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford and others pointed out, the Government’s view is that the Theft Act 1968 provides sufficient sanctions to deal with the problem. He made a powerful case about some of the issues with the Sentencing Council, which I will come on to in a moment. I want to take the opportunity as the Front Bench spokesman to recognise that pets are not just objects; they are sentient beings and companions to people. The fact that they are covered for this purpose under the Theft Act does not take away at all from the fact that they are sentient beings and more than just property.

In his introduction, the hon. Member for Hartlepool highlighted the fact that, somewhat bizarrely, the Act has a provision for the theft of mushrooms and for the theft of wild animals. He asked why if we can have provisions for those, we cannot have one for pets. The reason why they are pulled out is that it was judged at the time that sometimes there could be doubt about whether a mushroom was public property or private property, and there could be some doubt about whether somebody would have ownership of a wild animal. It is beyond doubt that pets have an owner, so that provision did not apply.

Turning to sentencing, a number of hon. Members—including, quite powerfully, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford, but also my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Henry Smith)—highlighted the current Sentencing Council guidelines. Hon. Members will appreciate that sentencing is a matter for the Ministry of Justice, policing is a matter for the Home Office and companion animals form part of the portfolio of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs managed by my noble Friend, Lord Gardiner. However, I will do my best to describe the position as I see it.

It is important to remember that in 2016, the independent Sentencing Council updated its sentencing guidelines for theft offences. The new guidelines acknowledge that theft that causes emotional distress to the victim or where the item stolen is of a substantial value, regardless of the monetary worth, will indicate a higher monetary value tends to be stolen.

Dr Cameron: Will the Minister give way?

George Eustice: I was about to come to the hon. Lady’s question, but I will give way.
Our reading of the current guidance, which was issued in 2016, is that in applying that guidance, the theft of a pet should be considered as either a category two or a category three offence. The custodial sentence is two years for a category two offence and one year for a category three. My hon. Friend is right that, applying our interpretation of the most recent guidance, a seven-year maximum penalty is largely theoretical for pet theft unless there are other aggravating circumstances. But as a general rule, category two or three would seem to be an appropriate sentence.

I hope that I have been able to reassure Members of the seriousness with which we take this issue. The Government have demonstrated in just the last six months that we are willing to change the law wherever necessary. Although at the moment the Government are not convinced that we need to change the law, I want to give three undertakings. First, let us use this debate to be absolutely clear that the Government interpret the latest guidance from the Sentencing Council to mean that the theft of a pet should generally be treated as a category two or three offence.

Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford and others made an important point about the need for statistics. This afternoon, I asked Gareth Pritchard, the Home Office policing lead for dogs, to marshal accurate data from the 44 police forces. It should not be left to third parties to try their luck through freedom of information requests—I agree that Government should marshal that. I have asked him to generate that data and to provide me with a report of the most accurate data he is able to gather.

Thirdly, I will discuss with my noble friend Lord Gardiner whether there are any other things that we have considered by way of enforcement and to improve detection rates for this crime. One of the messages I picked up from hon. Members’ contributions is that it may be not so much that the ability to sentence is not there or even that the maximum penalties are wrong, but simply that too few of these crimes are detected and too few prosecutions are brought.

Hugh Gaffney: Social media is being used to show some ridiculous acts on animals. That video evidence should be used to sentence more heavily.

George Eustice: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The internet and the growth of social media have created many challenges in enforcing legislation on pet sales, but they also give us a ready way to identify culprits, particularly those who are breaching rules. Rather than seeing the internet and social media as threats, we should use them where we can to gain evidence, as he points out.

In conclusion, we have had a very thoughtful and detailed debate that I believe does justice to the 106,000 people who signed the petition. Although the Government are not convinced for change, I hope that, through those undertakings, I have been able to demonstrate that we intend to do more work and gather more evidence in this area.

6.9 pm

Mike Hill: I thank all the Members who got involved in this important debate, particularly my hon. Friends the Members for Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill (Hugh Gaffney) and for Peterborough (Fiona Onasanya), and the hon. Members for Crawley (Henry Smith), for Dartford (Gareth Johnson), for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson), for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), for Clacton (Giles Watling) and for East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow (Dr Cameron). Of course, I also thank the Minister and the shadow Minister for their contributions.

I thank the Minister for pointing out the reasoning behind the specification of mushrooms and wild animals in the Theft Act 1968, and for his clear observations about pets and animals being sentient beings, not commodities. I sincerely hope that the Government are convinced enough to change the law soon. Too many pet thieves have got away with light sentences because of unacceptable and irrelevant guidelines. All pets should be treated equally, regardless of their monetary value.

I thank the petitioners—particularly Dr Daniel Allen, John Cooper, QC, and Debbie Matthews, the founder of Sampa—for bringing forward this important petition, which clearly has cross-party support. I am proud to have carried out my duties as a member of the Petitions Committee by introducing the debate on behalf of the Committee.

Finally, on behalf of Debbie Matthews, whose father, Sir Bruce Forsyth, was a big contributor to this debate in his own right, I say, “Nice to see you, to see you nice.”

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered e-petition 212174 relating to pet theft.

6.11 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Tuesday 3 July 2018

[SIR ROGER GALE in the Chair]

Leaving the EU: Implications for Scotland

9.30 am

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the implications for Scotland of leaving the EU.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I am delighted to have secured this debate and I thank my colleagues on the Backbench Business Committee for supporting my application. I begin this debate in the hope that we can have a measured, clear analysis of the facts and challenges that lie ahead, which are of material importance to Scotland and her prosperity.

The implications for Scotland of leaving the European Union are profound and significant. First, we need to consider the damaging effect that leaving the EU will have on Scotland’s vital interests both at home and abroad. Nobody can deny that the UK’s governing party is hopelessly divided against itself, as the UK faces arguably the biggest challenge and upheaval since the second world war. The Cabinet speaks not with one voice, but with several confused and contradictory voices. How can it enter into negotiations with the EU and inspire confidence from any quarter?

Colin Clark (Gordon) (Con): Does the hon. Lady accept that almost a third of Scottish National party voters also voted to leave the EU and that, therefore, the SNP is divided on this issue too?

Patricia Gibson: That is quite an interesting point. I hope to maintain a respectful dialogue in this debate. I want to focus on the damage that is being done to Scotland, because a lot of people have watched the unfolding of the Brexit process with horror and alarm.

The UK Government’s own leaked analysis has shown that Scotland’s GDP could face a hit of up to 9%, with analysis from the Fraser of Allander Institute showing that a hard Brexit could cost Scotland up to 80,000 jobs. The final figure could be higher or lower—we have no idea at the moment. The Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, has revealed that Brexit has already cost each household £900.

The implications for Scotland of leaving the European Union are profound and significant. First, we need to consider the damaging effect that leaving the EU will have on Scotland’s vital interests both at home and abroad. Nobody can deny that the UK’s governing party is hopelessly divided against itself, as the UK faces arguably the biggest challenge and upheaval since the second world war. The Cabinet speaks not with one voice, but with several confused and contradictory voices. How can it enter into negotiations with the EU and inspire confidence from any quarter?

Patricia Gibson: The hon. Gentleman is correct. We know that until everything is agreed, nothing is agreed. In that context it is hard to make final predictions. I say to him, however, that we have experts whose minds are more academic on this issue than his or mine, and their opinions matter. Independent forecasters, the UK Government’s own analysis, the Fraser of Allander Institute, Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs, the Economic and Social Research Institute and the National Farmers Union have all expressed real concern about what Brexit means for Scotland. I direct the hon. Gentleman to those sources, not to what I am saying.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech and she makes the point, which Government Members cannot bear to hear, that business, the trade unions and all of civic society in Scotland are concerned about the impact of Brexit on Scotland. The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) said that we should be masters of our own fate. Does my hon. Friend agree that the whole point of this debate is that the people of Scotland are not masters of their own fate, because they are being taken out of the European Union against their democratic will?

Patricia Gibson: My hon. and learned Friend makes an excellent point: we do not really know at the moment. That is true of all forecasts in any context. We do not really know. What we need to do, however, is pull together our Governments, countries and peoples, to make a success of what will inevitably happen, given the passing of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. We are leaving the European Union, therefore we need to work together. No one knows what will happen, but we are responsible for making our own future. We are the masters of our own fate.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I agree with the hon. Lady. That is why we are asking EU citizens to do something unthinkable. Many of them have paid tax and national insurance in this country. If the SNP is so opposed to what is happening, why does it not back the people’s vote, or be straight with the people of Scotland that it is just trying to churn up the argument for independence? It should be straight with the people and tell them that, or back the people’s vote.
Patricia Gibson: Sir Roger, you will forgive me for tittering when a Lib Dem asks me to be straight with the people. We in the SNP are absolutely straight with the people of Scotland, who are waking up to the fact that they have been misled. You do not need to take my word for it; you just need to speak to John Major, your former leader and Prime Minister, who openly says that the people have been misled over Brexit. Of course, the people of Scotland were not misled, because we voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU, but that appears not to matter to the constituents that you represent.

Joanna Cherry: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives conveniently choose to ignore the fact that the majority of Scottish voters in 2016 voted for Scottish political parties that said they wanted to hold another independence referendum in the event of Scotland being taken out of the EU against its will? Whether they like it or not, there is a mandate in the Scottish Parliament for that second independence referendum. It is time that they respected the democracy of that vote.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I ask hon. Members to confine interventions to the length of a proper intervention and not to make speeches.

Patricia Gibson: I will simply respond to my hon. and learned Friend by saying that that is why the Lib Dems are increasingly irrelevant in UK and Scottish politics.

Stephen Kerr: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Patricia Gibson: I will make some progress. We in the SNP believe that the Government should negotiate to stay in the single market and the customs union, not to protect the exchange of citizens’ rights between the EU and the UK.

Another area of huge concern is the importance of the single market and the customs union to protecting our social, trade and investment partnerships with EU businesses and Governments. The Scottish Government’s impact analysis has shown that a failure to remain in the single market and the customs union, or to secure a free trade agreement, would see Scotland’s GDP around £12.7 billion lower by 2030 than it would be under continued EU membership. That would mean a loss equivalent to £2,300 per person in Scotland. In addition, the impact analysis shows that a so-called Canada-type deal with the EU would still leave Scotland’s GDP £9 billion lower by 2030, or £1,610 per head.

Scotland’s food and drink exports have reached £6 billion—the highest level ever—with the EU being the largest market. However, the Economic and Social Research Institute reported that a hard Brexit would result in up to a 90% fall in exports to the EU from Scotland. Those are important voices from industry, and everybody who cares about Scotland’s economic prospects should listen to them. A hard Brexit would leave the UK isolated on the world stage and expose the country to a regulatory race to the bottom, compromising our trading relationships and consumer standards.

The right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) has said that Brexit was an opportunity for widespread deregulation. The Foreign Secretary has said, “Scrap social Europe”. Daniel Hannan, a Tory MEP, said that all contracts between employers and employees should be “free contracts” with no statutory protection. There is no question but that Brexit will see a bonfire of British workers’ rights, given that those words come from the governing party. I do not claim to speak for the people of England, and nor should I, but we in Scotland are alarmed by those comments, which go against the values and beliefs that the people of Scotland hold dear.

The Secretary of State for International Trade is on the record as being “relaxed” about the diminution of food standards post Brexit, although the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has said he is opposed to it. The Prime Minister simply responded that the questions were “hypothetical”. Food standards that are currently banned across the EU may become permissible in the UK post Brexit, which precipitates concerns about the proverbial race to the bottom. More relaxed standards have implications for animal welfare and raise potential environmental and public health concerns. Will Scotland really have to endure such standards post Brexit? Is that what was meant by taking back control?

The UK will seek to pursue new trade deals, particularly with the US. Since we already know that procurement and public contracts are important objectives for the US in negotiating a trade deal, as demonstrated by the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership negotiations, Scotland’s public services are at risk of being bargained off in new agreements. For the people of Scotland, that is simply unacceptable. Hon. Members across the House will know that, because they, too, will have received countless emails from constituents about it. If any hon. Member in the Chamber has not received any emails about the issue, they should feel free to intervene now.

A growing number of people in Scotland are bewildered. In Scotland, we had a referendum on EU membership, which there was no evidence that Scotland wanted. We in Scotland voted to remain in the EU by a convincing majority, but we are now being removed against our will from a family of nations of which we wish to remain part. To add insult to injury, Scotland’s voice in the UK negotiations has been summarily ignored. We all witnessed the farce on 12 June. Despite the implications of Scotland being dragged out of the EU, we were allocated a mere 19 minutes. Not one Scottish MP from any party was permitted to speak and there was no protected time for the debate. We witnessed an unprecedented ripping up of the devolution settlement, with Scotland’s voice silenced.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): On timing, does the hon. Lady recognise that in this Parliament, we have spent 252 hours debating Brexit, and we will spend several more, whereas the Scottish Parliament has spent only 25 hours on legislation that was rushed through on an emergency basis? It is not right for her to take a high hand when it comes to time.

Patricia Gibson: The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of this, so I will enlighten him: Scotland did not vote for Brexit and the Brexit negotiations are being carried out by the UK Government. They are therefore duty-bound to allow Scottish MPs, who represent people who did not vote for Brexit, proper time to debate the implications of Brexit and the fact that the devolution settlement has been torn up, about which he appears to have no concern.
Let us be clear: in the democratically elected Scottish Parliament, every single party save the Tories—the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, Labour and the Greens—voted overwhelmingly against repatriating powers to London, by 95 votes to 32. During the Standing Orders debate in the Commons Chamber on 13 June, I was stunned to hear Scottish Tory MPs dismiss that lack of legislative consent—that power grab—by saying, to paraphrase them, “What does it matter? It is only powers over this, that or the other.” They may say that, but when you ignore the entire concept of consent and ride roughshod over democratic institutions elected by the people of Scotland, to which the Tory Government in Westminster have not listened, you do so at your peril.

**John Lamont** (Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk) (Con): On the issue of a power grab, last week the Scottish Government and the First Minister attempted a Government reshuffle, which created the biggest Scottish Government in history and reflects the Scottish Government’s expanding power base. How can the hon. Lady claim there has been a power grab when there are more Ministers and Cabinet Secretaries in the Scottish Government than ever before, and when 80 new powers are coming to the Scottish Government after Brexit?

**Patricia Gibson:** It is interesting that a Tory Member is concerned about the expanding public purse in these times of austerity and the expanded Scottish Government. That is good. Perhaps he should take up those concerns with the ever-expanding, dripping roast that is the House of Lords. I am sure that the Prime Minister would be happy—

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Patricia Gibson:** I am dealing with this intervention—one at a time! The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) will find that the Prime Minister’s Cabinet has also expanded as she tries to hold together an unholy coalition of Brexiteers and people with a bit of sense, of whom there are increasingly few in the Cabinet.

**Stephen Kerr:** I have a simple question for the hon. Lady: if there has been a power grab, why did Nicola Sturgeon expand her Cabinet? Is it not factually correct that it was because there are new powers now and there are new powers coming?

**Patricia Gibson:** It is that kind of attitude that has seen my party’s membership soar by 10,000 people in a short period of time. The hon. Gentleman says “if there has been a power grab”, which suggests there has not been one—[Interruption.] If you make an intervention, you have to let me answer. That is how the game works. It appears that this is a game for some people, but it is about your country of Scotland and the people you represent. If you let me speak, we might get somewhere.

To dismiss the fact that there has been a power grab shows a breath-taking contempt for devolution and the Scottish Parliament. Under the Scotland Act—

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Patricia Gibson:** Can I finish my point?

**Stephen Kerr:** You’re in charge.

**Patricia Gibson:** It doesn’t stop people shouting.

**Joanna Cherry:** Get some manners.

**Patricia Gibson:** They are really lacking. You do not get this in the Scottish Parliament, Sir Roger.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) should go back and look at the devolution settlement. Anything that is not reserved is devolved, and should correctly come back to the Scottish Parliament. When you start to ignore legislative consent, which has served that Parliament well for the 20 years it has existed, you cross a Rubicon and get to a point where you do what you like and ignore the Scottish Parliament anyway. I do not think that treats the sovereign people of Scotland with respect.

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Lady give way on that point?

**Patricia Gibson:** I will make some progress.

Holyrood is not Westminster. In Scotland, sovereignty lies with the people of Scotland. Under the constitutional rules, the Government should not proceed with any measure that affects Scotland without the Scottish Parliament’s consent. For the record—there has been some perhaps willful confusion about this—the kind of powers being clawed back by Westminster are in 24 areas where they want to retain power in the wake of Britain’s exit from the EU, including agriculture, fisheries, food labelling and public procurement. Public procurement is interesting, because that could constitute an attack on our public services. I have listened to Scottish Tory MPs rubbing concerns about those powers being clawed back as though they do not matter, as we have heard today. They do matter and anyone who doubts it only has to look at the SNP’s soaring membership after the power grab was brought to public attention, as I have already said.

The SNP has been accused of effectively trying to veto Brexit. However, legislative consent was withheld by every party save the Tories, so the argument—

**Christine Jardine:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Patricia Gibson:** I am in the middle of a point.

The argument that it is some kind of SNP plot simply does not wash. Let there be no mistake: the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament recognise that there may be times—this is the point that Conservative Members really have to listen to because I have heard them rubbish this in the past—when UK-wide frameworks are required post Brexit and when they would be in Scotland’s interests. However, the way to achieve such frameworks is through negotiation. That is what a statesman or stateswoman would do; that is grown-up politics. Achieving UK-wide frameworks should not be achieved by strangling the voice of those who were democratically elected to speak for Scotland.

The stand-off that we have is in no one’s interests and that is why it is important to bring forward emergency legislation to remove section 11 from the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. Devolution cannot operate on the terms of grace and favour. To take powers restricting the competence of Holyrood and to exercise
those powers in the face of an explicit decision by Holyrood that they should not be exercised is, whatever way you look at it, a power grab.

Under devolution, that which is not reserved is devolved—it is as simple and as important as that. Make no mistake: this process is about being able to adjust the terms on which devolution operates through delegated legislation without the consent—and even against the wishes—of the Scottish Parliament. I am fleetingly reminded of the fact that we were told how important it was to have English votes for English laws. I wonder when we will have Scottish votes for Scottish laws.

Many who are hostile to the Scottish Parliament have tried to dismiss the concerns that it has raised about a hard Brexit and Scotland’s voice being silenced as a ploy to promote independence, but that is not the case. This is about something, Sir Roger, that some people in this Chamber would do well to remember—it is about standing up for Scotland, and it is supported even by those in the Scottish Parliament who do not support independence and who are not yet convinced of the case for independence.

Christine Jardine rose—

Patricia Gibson: I am finishing up.

I say today that those who value the Union should beware the next referendum on Scottish independence—and it will come—because the debate has crystallised. [Interruption.] There is chuntering from a sedentary position, Sir Roger. The debate has crystallised like never before. The people of Scotland will be asked simply, “Who do you trust most to govern in the best interests of Scotland: Westminster or Holyrood?” Given what we have witnessed over recent weeks and months, it does not take too great a leap of the imagination to guess what the answer will be from the people of Scotland.

The matters that we are discussing today are not just about Brexit or devolution or Scotland’s economic interests; they are ultimately about trust. Every day, this Tory Government demonstrate just a little bit more that they are ultimately about trust. Every day, this Tory Government demonstrate just a little bit more that they cannot be trusted by the people of Scotland. We are not the “valued and equal” partners we were told we were when we were love-bombed during the 2014 referendum campaign, and the people of Scotland know it. I urge all when we will have Scottish votes for Scottish laws.

As a Scottish Conservative and Unionist, I strongly believe in democracy. The Scottish people rejected independence in 2014, just as the British people voted to leave the EU two years later. Both referendums were massive exercises in democracy and in both many people voted for the first time, and we must respect that. If we are to retain that level of interest and keep people’s trust in our system, those results must be respected—both the independence referendum and the Brexit referendum.

While a majority of Scottish people voted to remain in the European Union, 1 million of them turned out to vote leave. More Scots voted to leave the European Union than voted for the Scottish National party in the last general election.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): Following the hon. Gentleman’s logic, the number of people who voted for independence was 60% higher than the number who voted to leave the European Union. What, then, does his logic suggest we should do about the 1.6 million people who voted to leave the United Kingdom?

Colin Clark: I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for that question; I absolutely respect that point, and I covered it in the first line of my speech. People voted to stay in the United Kingdom, and we had a United Kingdom vote in the European Union referendum.

Patricia Gibson rose—

Colin Clark: I will make some progress.

The Scottish people now expect politicians to carry out their wishes. I was disappointed to hear the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran take quite such a negative tone. Nobody on the Government Benches is denying the challenges that surround our exit from the EU, nor are we naive to the scale of the work still to be completed, and much work has been done.

However, the situation is not doom and gloom—far from it, in fact. Done correctly, Brexit can provide many exciting opportunities for Scotland. Overnight, the Scottish Parliament will become considerably more powerful as a result of our exit from the EU. Sovereignty and control over our own laws was a major driver of the leave vote, and I am delighted that the Government, through the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, have already taken steps to bring powers home to the United Kingdom. Brexit will give us the opportunity to bring decision making closer to people, not only through Westminster but through the devolved institutions in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Stormont.

Patricia Gibson: As the hon. Gentleman was speaking, one thought occurred to me that I would like to ask him about, because I am sure he has thoughts on it. He talked about the importance of respecting democracy, and I am sure we all agree with that, but does he share the concerns that many in his party have about the lack of transparency regarding the funding for the EU leave campaign, the dirty money that appears to have been
involved and the lack of ability to trace the source of that money? Does he have any concerns about how that might have influenced the result?

Colin Clark: I thank the hon. Lady for the question, but I have an absolute respect for the institutions of this country, including the Electoral Commission, which will investigate funding, whether in Scottish elections or the EU referendum, I will respect its findings, because I have respect for UK institutions.

On day one after exit, more than 80 new powers will go directly from Brussels to Edinburgh—80 areas in which Scottish politicians can make decisions in the best interests of the Scottish people. The UK Government have rightly confirmed that they will presume devolution for all returning powers, meaning that only in exceptional circumstances will powers be temporarily held at UK level so that we can have some sort of framework, which Scottish industry and United Kingdom industry want. I believe that to be sensible and pragmatic. The UK Government travelled a significant distance from their original proposal, and we are now in a place where we can guarantee that Brexit will be to the advantage of the devolution settlement.

Of course, another upside of leaving the EU will be the ability to send more Scottish goods out to new markets, as we take control over our trade and chart a new course in the world. Scottish economic growth has been driven by exports, and the north-east of Scotland, where my constituency is located, is the largest exporting region in Scotland. In 2015, total exports from the north-east amounted to more than £8 billion—21.3% of total Scottish exports, in an area with 8% of the population. Leaving the EU will allow our exporting businesses to reach new markets and customers, and to grow those numbers further.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran mentioned the food and drink sector and agriculture. It is a significant part of the north-east’s economy. It directly employs 22,000 people; 51% of those jobs are in agriculture, and a further 11% are in fishing. Leaving the EU will bring huge benefits to those people. We can finally design an agriculture policy that works for Scotland, and it will not be a DEFRA-centric, top-down policy. It will be a policy set by the Scottish Government for the unique needs of Scottish farmers—Members can see from my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests that I am one myself.

Fisheries policy will also escape the clutches of the EU, and I am delighted that we are already having conversations on that. It is amazing that the Scottish Government wish to receive powers and then immediately hand them back to the EU, especially on the common fisheries policy, which would not go down well in our fishing communities.

Leaving, therefore, provides opportunities and hope to some of Scotland’s key industries. It will allow us to be part of an internationalist United Kingdom and to embrace new trading opportunities.

Joanna Cherry: Apparently, the majority of sea fish caught at and off the coast of Scotland is sold into the European single market. Can the hon. Gentleman tell us where it is going to be sold after we leave the single market?

Colin Clark: That is a good question. As the hon. and learned Lady knows, we are not leaving Europe. We are leaving the EU. We would hope to form a frictionless free trade arrangement with the EU. Norway is also a huge exporter and is not a full member of the EU. We hope to negotiate a free trade arrangement with the EU.

Joanna Cherry: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Norway is a member of the single market, through the European economic area? Does he not even know that basic fact? Does he understand that the reason Norway joined the single market was so it could sell its produce into the single market? Will he answer my question—where will the fish caught in and off the coast of Scotland be sold after we leave the European single market?

Colin Clark: It will go to Europe, with us outside the EU. It will go to Japan, America and the rest of the world. Those are the enormous opportunities that we have. It is incredible that the hon. and learned Lady does not realise that the common fisheries policy means that British fishermen catch only 40% of their potential fish catch. We cannot go to other countries in Europe and take their agricultural production, so it is important that more of our fish should be caught by Scottish and United Kingdom fishermen. I look forward to that happening. I am interested in how the Scottish Government explain to people on the coast why they want to hand fishing rights back to Europe immediately.

To move on to other industries, which I am sure Scottish National Party Members will ask me about, last year whisky represented 20% of the UK’s food and drink exports—£4.4 billion. Diageo and Macallan, in the constituency next to mine, have made multi-million pound investments because they have confidence in our international future. Ardmore, Glen Garioch and Glendronach in my own patch predict a huge improvement in sales, which is good news to me as a farmer, because hopefully that will happen with Scottish barley. The reason for the investment is confidence in an export future and not sharing the Scottish Government’s negativity. A free trade deal with India alone would massively boost whisky. We cannot actually grow enough barley in Scotland—and apparently not in the whole United Kingdom—to supply the Indian market, if we had full access to it.

Oil and gas in the north-east—a dollar-denominated industry trading around the world—is resilient after a massive price collapse: the industry still supports 300,000 jobs. Its international horizons are huge, and already the vast majority of its exports are outside the EU. It has no problems with taking on the opportunities of exporting outside the EU, and is investing vast sums in the north-east of Scotland. Financial services, from Aberdeen Asset Management to Artemis in Edinburgh, have global brands and huge international opportunities. They invest in international opportunities throughout the world, not just in the EU. The UK is the clearing bank of Europe and the world; it is the hub of mergers and acquisitions.

What is the threat? We do not have to go far to see bigger risks in Scotland than Brexit. INEOS, the largest private UK company, which has invested £2 billion in the North sea and Grangemouth chemical plant, plans to invest £2 billion in the north-west of Europe. Brexit?
No, apparently: from listening to Radio 4 this morning it is about fracking—we have to be careful how we pronounce that—from the US. It is half the price of gas in Europe. However, the Scottish Government will not listen to science. They want to demonise fracking wherever it takes place—America, Scotland or England. High-tech companies will run a mile from an anti-business Government who believe in quasi-science and carry on peddling it.

Peter Grant: Is it the policy of the Scottish Conservative party that fracking should be allowed in Scotland and that decisions about it should be taken by Westminster?

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be creative enough to relate his reply to the matter under debate, the European Union. I am interested to hear his response.

Colin Clark: I will only point out that my party, and this Parliament, will listen to science. I hope that the Scottish Government will also do so; on many things they do.

I want finally to mention farming, the oldest industry. Just under two weeks ago I was at the Royal Highland Show, as I am sure were many other hon. Members. I learned that the Scottish Government’s climate change ambitions pose a bigger threat to farming than Brexit—that is the view of Jim McLaren, chairman of Quality Meat Scotland and the former president of the National Farmers Union of Scotland. He has said that the Scottish Government setting a net zero carbon target in law means zero livestock production in Scotland. Members speak about the risk that Brexit poses to the EU, but there is a report out there saying that livestock farming in Scotland will no longer be viable if there is a zero carbon target. I did not write the report: I read it for the first time at the highland show, and it was remarkable. That situation is potentially devastating to Scottish farming.

My final point, and my overall point as a businessman, farmer and investor, is that whether we are talking about whisky, oil and gas, petrochemicals, finance or farming, investor confidence is paramount, and the Scottish Government are damaging it. Her Majesty’s Government are working for the best Brexit possible; the SNP would sabotage the Brexit vote and Brexit.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I intend to call the Front-Bench speakers at 10.30 am. Do the maths—there are five Members waiting to speak.

10.5 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): That gives me five minutes, and I shall follow your instructions, Sir Roger. I thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) for bringing the matter forward. I want to speak from the perspective of the relationship between Northern Ireland and Scotland, and the importance of maintaining it. It is essential to enhance and strengthen our centuries-old connection, regardless of how we all exit the EU.

I read an interesting article about the history of our two nations. Long before the first plantation of Ulster in the 1600s, there was a very close connection between Ulster and Scotland. Lowland Scots speech was introduced to Ulster at the beginning of the 17th century, becoming Ulster Scots, which, according to the 2011 census, is still spoken by about 8% of the population of Northern Ireland, many of whom live in my constituency. I am proud to say that I am descended from the Stewart of the Scottish lowlands. My maiden speech in this place was in Ulster Scots, which is an important part of my heritage and culture. I am a proud Ulster-Scot. My wife sees my frugal ways and perhaps wishes that there was not so much Scots in me, because I can be very tight when it comes to looking after the purse strings.

We are looking forward to the Orangefest celebrations on 12 July, when we will have numerous Scots bands walking our streets, as well as our home-grown bagpiping bands. Bagpiping is another Scottish import that many in Northern Ireland excel at—(a Northern Ireland band has won the world pipe band championships in five of the past seven years. My party leader, Arlene Foster, spoke at a 12 July parade in Scotland only this weekend.

Our nations have been linked for years. From Ballyhalbert, which is not far from my home, to the coast of Scotland can be clearly seen—it is only 12 miles away. There is talk of building a bridge. I am not sure whether that will ever happen, but it underlines the important connection between the nations of Scotland and Northern Ireland. The bridge would be a way of supporting that, if the Government were minded to invest the money. The DUP has proposed a feasibility study of the business and tourism potential. Indeed, my local council recently passed a motion stating that “as the Council’s vision is to promote the Borough as a key destination, it is recommended that the Council writes to the First Minister for Scotland, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and in the absence of the Executive the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Infrastructure welcoming these discussions and requesting the east coast of the Borough be considered in any feasibility study or business case as a possible connection point for a new bridge between Northern Ireland and Scotland”.

The vision is clear. We should make the most of the ability to be more easily connected, but even without a bridge we can still be connected, and not just by culture and history but by a closer post-Brexit relationship. That is the desire of the people and businesses of Northern Ireland. It is my belief that our enhanced connectivity, after Scotland and the rest of us leave the EU, can be used for external opportunities and will be useful to our shared agricultural and fishing industries, and many other links. The hon. Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) referred to farming and fishing, which are two sectors that we want to build on in Northern Ireland. We can do that better working alongside our Scottish brethren and sisters, in a way that enhances our relationship.

As with Northern Ireland, the biggest part of Scotland’s trade remains with the rest of the UK. “Export Statistics Scotland”, the Scottish Government’s annual trade statistics, show that in 2016 Scotland exported more than £45 billion in goods and services to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, while exports to the EU totalled £12.7 billion. The figures speak for themselves. Exports to the rest of the UK make up 61% of Scotland’s total exports. Nearly four times the amount of EU trade with the UK is supported by Independent research shows that around 560,000 jobs in Scotland—nearly one in four of all jobs—are supported.
by demand for Scottish goods and services from the rest of the UK. It is clear that we are better off together. That is the fact of the matter. I sit alongside my Scottish National party friends and colleagues because I value their friendship. I do not agree with everything they say, as they know, and they do not agree with everything I say, but we are friends and colleagues and we try to do our best in the Chamber for our constituents.

Greater connectivity between Scotland and Northern Ireland would strengthen the business links that have already been built up and make it easier to attract inward investment. The implication of Scotland leaving the EU alongside Northern Ireland, Wales and England will be a closer relationship with Northern Ireland. That will be to the benefit of all four nations within the great United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We will be better together, for everyone’s mutual benefit.

Stephen Kerr: There is a Scottish comedic character, made famous by Rikki Fulton, by the name of the Reverend I.M. Jolly. He is famed because he is miserable. He can never bring himself to be upbeat, positive or optimistic. I am afraid that that caricature is one that the SNP seems to have voluntarily adopted. It is being so cheerful that keeps it going. It fits the SNP’s narrative to spread doom and gloom and to talk down our country’s future. As a Scottish Conservative, I insist that our best days lie ahead of us as part of the United Kingdom, the world’s most successful political and economic union.

The SNP wants to create an air of constitutional crisis, but Scotland is not buying any of that talk, and people are sick and tired of the SNP’s obsession with a second independence referendum. Keith Brown MSP, who was sacked last week by Nicola Sturgeon as Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, was only recently elected deputy leader of the SNP. He now claims to be focusing all his energy on building up readiness for a campaign for a second independence referendum as early as next April. Yet at the weekend Andrew Wilson, the former MSP who produced the so-called growth commission report, the SNP’s blueprint for independence that promised only a generation of misery, said that he was interested only in the softest possible form of independence—presumably in name only. He recognised that people in Scotland were not interested in another independence referendum.

Patricia Gibson: The hon. Gentleman is once again trying to make this out to be some kind of SNP plot. What are his views on the fact that the SNP, the Labour party, the Greens and the Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament also withheld consent for Brexit? Are they involved in the SNP plot?

Stephen Kerr: I can only imagine that Scottish Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats regret deeply ever getting into any kind of alliance with the Scottish National party, but it is not for me to speak for them.

What is important to Scotland and Scottish business? Liz Cameron, the chief executive of the Scottish Chambers of Commerce, has said: “The ability to trade freely between the constituent parts of the UK without additional compliance measures is absolutely vital to a large proportion of businesses, and we need to see both Governments co-operating and making decisions together, enabling the private sector to create jobs and grow the economy.”

To underline the importance of the UK single market to Scotland, it cannot be said too often that Scotland exports four times as much to the rest of the United Kingdom as it does to the EU. That is £46 billion going to the UK, and only £12 billion going to the EU. No one on the Government Benches is saying that trade with the rest of the European Union is not important—it is vital—but just because we are leaving the European Union does not mean that we are going to cease trading in any scenario. Other countries that are outside full EU membership, the single market and the customs union trade successfully with countries that are members.

We need to forge a new, deep and special relationship that is founded upon the principles of free and fair trade. That will inevitably include an arrangement on customs. Only in the minds of the obsessive and negative SNP is the answer to leaving the EU to break up a Union that is four times more valuable to Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Colin Clark) said, just last week we saw that UK exports to India have grown by 31% year on year. That is just a sample of what we can achieve once we leave the EU in March 2019 and have the chance to strike our own trade deals. He also mentioned the Scotch Whisky Association and the opportunity there. In India, Scotch imports account for just 1% of total whisky consumption. There are massive opportunities.

Brexit is seen by too many as only being a challenge. We see it as an opportunity too. Leaving the EU will give more powers to Holyrood and Westminster, yet we have seen little imagination and creativity at Holyrood on how the powers will be used. Indeed, the Scottish nationalists would rather see those powers kept in Brussels. As was said earlier, why on earth would Nicola Sturgeon reshape her Cabinet and add Ministers if it was not to handle increased powers? Leaving the European Union needs to be treated as an opportunity.

In closing, I will quickly mention one thing. If there is one area of professional activity that can change the productivity landscape and enhance our prospects as a nation exporting to the world, it is sales productivity. We need to uplift our commercial proficiency and effectiveness in professional sales and be a nation that values its salespeople. I feel strongly about that. A few weeks ago I had the privilege of welcoming the Secretary of State for International Trade and his ministerial team to Stirling, alongside the Secretary of State for Scotland and other Government officials, for the first meeting of the UK Board of Trade in Scotland for hundreds of years. A reception was held that evening in the great hall of Stirling castle. The room was abuzz with anticipation and excitement for the export opportunities that lie ahead for businesses in my constituency and throughout Scotland as we leave the European Union.

In Stirling we have some fantastic businesses that are ready to take up the challenge and the new opportunities, including Fallen Brewing, which I will be visiting later this week. This brewery in the town of Kippen has been exporting across the UK, and like so many other local businesses, it needs only the slightest encouragement to push into the significant overseas markets for British beers. A great national effort is required to sell our products and services around the world. To summarise, I believe that Scotland’s professional sales talent and capability will be key to a prosperous post-Brexit global Britain.
Joanna Cherry: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing the debate. I say gently to my friend the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) that many of us in Scotland who come from the Catholic tradition find the marches he described that Arlene Foster attended last weekend intimidating, upsetting and quite offensive. There is no place for sectarianism in modern Scotland. Perhaps it was not a very good idea for his party leader to come to that Orange parade in Fife last weekend.

Jim Shannon: Will the hon. and learned Lady give way?

Joanna Cherry: I will make some progress. I just wanted to make that statement.

I want to speak about the implications of Brexit for security, judicial co-operation and law enforcement in Scotland, which the UK Government have overlooked to date. That is not my view; it is the view of the distinguished former judge at the European Court of Justice, Sir David Edward. He is also a distinguished former judge on the Scottish bench. When he gave evidence to a Select Committee at the Scottish Parliament last year, he said that so far in their negotiations with the EU, the UK Government have overlooked the significance of the separate Scottish legal system, the Scottish judicial system and the Scottish prosecution system in relation to justice and home affairs issues. He went on to describe the UK Government’s paper, “Enforcement and dispute resolution”, as “an undergraduate essay that would have failed.”

He says that those writing such papers are not aware of the problems posed by the separate Scottish legal system and do not want to hear from experts who have offered to help.

I declare an interest, because in a former life I was senior advocate depute at the Crown Office. I worked in these fields, and I am well aware of how European Union law has become woven into the fabric of Scots law over the past 40 years. Serious organised criminality and terrorism do not respect national borders. If we leave the EU without securing continued participation in EU criminal justice measures, it could mean Scotland losing the common set of tools that allow law enforcement agencies in Scotland and across the EU to tackle international challenges effectively.

The Scottish Government have asked the UK Government on numerous occasions to share their planning on key issues that will have implications for justice and home affairs in Scotland, but they have failed to do so. Indeed, the UK Government’s future partnership paper, “Security, law enforcement and criminal justice”, which was published in September 2017, was prepared without any consultation with the Scottish Government. It did not even acknowledge that Scotland is a separate legal jurisdiction with its own criminal justice, prosecution and police agencies. Just two months ago, the UK Government published presentation slides titled, “Framework for the UK-EU Security Partnership”. The slides cover internal and external security and were used in the EU negotiations, but they contain matters that directly affect Scotland, including operational matters that fall under the responsibility of the Lord Advocate, the head of Scotland’s prosecution system. The slides were prepared without any consultation with the Scottish Government or the Lord Advocate, nor were the Scottish Government advised of the publication of the slides.

Safeguarding Scotland’s independent justice system necessitates the Scottish Government’s full involvement in the negotiations between the UK Government and the EU. To date that has not happened. The Scottish Government have been cut out of any involvement in the negotiations, and the implications for justice and home affairs in Scotland are therefore not being recognised. I want to hear what the Minister is going to do about that.

Before I sit down, I will give way to the hon. Member for Strangford.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. and learned Lady for giving way. I understand her position, but I want to put on the record that we are not a sectarian organisation. We are there to encourage people to enjoy culture, history and tradition, and no one should—nobody does—feel threatened by that in Scotland. We do not feel threatened by it in Newtownards whenever we are parading there on 12 July, or across the Province on other days.

Joanna Cherry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I can tell him that people from the Catholic community do feel threatened and offended by these demonstrations. I feel threatened and offended by them, and many of my constituents write to me asking how an organisation that traditionally marched to intimidate a section of the population can be allowed to continue to do so in a modern democracy. I realise the hon. Gentleman might like to change that, but that is the perception. Without doubt many people from the Catholic tradition will have cleared out of Cowdenbeath last weekend in fear of what they might experience if they remained.

Luke Graham: It is a pleasure to serve under your direction this morning, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing the debate. She started by saying she wanted a constructive debate. I prepared my remarks on that basis. However, as she was giving her speech it was clear that I would not need those remarks, so I will speak off the cuff.

SNP Members made a lot of noise about how they are the voice of Scotland and speak for Scotland. I am not so arrogant. I was elected as the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire, so that is who I speak for—I do not speak for all of Scotland, but I speak for my constituents. It is time SNP Members started to be a little more modest and speak for their constituents rather than claiming to speak for the whole nation.

A point was made about GDP and business confidence; apparently, Scotland was doing really well before Brexit. In fact, it is clear that GDP and business confidence lugged behind the rest of the UK before 2016. Some 20 years after devolution and after 11 years of the SNP Administration, Brexit is not responsible for our below-par economic performance compared with the rest of the UK. It is not responsible for the fact that we
are slipping in all the international education league tables or for the fact that we have not bucked the trend in the challenges that the NHS faces in Scotland, as it does in every other part of the UK. That is not down to Brexit; it is down to the SNP and its flawed Administration.

My next point is about scaremongering. The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran and others talked about EU citizens. That issue has been clearly dealt with. It was dealt with in the December agreement and then in the March transitional agreement. They should not stoke up fears among EU citizens in my constituency when they know that an agreement is on the table between the UK and the EU. In fact, the UK has unilaterally guaranteed some rights, and I am sure the Minister will talk about people's right to remain. Some people's family members will even come to the UK to join them. I am sure the Minister will reiterate those points, but I ask the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran to reflect on her comments, because they do nothing but undermine the confidence of people who contribute so much to my constituency.

Another point was raised about a bonfire of workers' rights, but how can that be? We have just passed legislation in the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill that bakes all the EU legislation into British law, which means that rights will be respected across the United Kingdom and we will not fall below them. If anything comes up in subsequent debates about reducing rights, I will certainly not vote for that. Again, the hon. Lady should reflect on the facts, not the fiction.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership was mentioned. For members of the audience who might not be so familiar with the TTIP negotiation, the European Union negotiated a specific clause to protect public health systems in the EU, so at there was no risk of United States companies coming and taking over our NHS or any of the other public health systems in Europe, unless those countries individually opted for that. That clause was part of the negotiation. If we are to have these fundamentally important debates, let us have them on facts, not fiction.

Finally—I am conscious of the time—we have to remember that this is not a zero-sum game. A power for the UK to join them. I am sure the Minister will reiterate those points, but I ask the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran to reflect on her comments, because they do nothing but undermine the confidence of people who contribute so much to my constituency.

My second frustration when discussing Brexit is the complete denial of the calamitous impact of Brexit on our economy. We know from the British Government's own leaked analysis that Scotland's GDP could face a hit of 9%: we know from the Fraser of Allander Institute that a hard Brexit is forecast to cost 80,000 jobs in Scotland, and we know from the Bank of England that Brexit has already cost constituents, including in Gordon, Ochil and South Perthshire and Stirling, £900 per household. That is why it is imperative that our compromise position of leaving the European Union but remaining in the single market and the customs union is implemented. The stark reality is that, when we all walked into the polling booths on 23 June 2016 to cast our votes, there was nothing—absolutely hee-haw—on the ballot paper about leaving the single market or the customs union. People did not vote for a Brexit that meant they would be poorer, but I am afraid that is the trajectory we are currently on.

So my message to the Minister today is absolutely crystal clear: he should stop listening to the Brexiteers on his Back Benches and instead listen to businesses and ordinary families who stand to lose so much as a result of our driving over the cliff edge to a hard Brexit. If the British Government will not listen to the warnings about a hard Brexit cliff edge, they might find that Scotland has unhooked the tow bar and taken a different path of independence.
Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing it and on the well-informed and comprehensive way in which she set out the social and economic impact that leaving the European Union threatens to have on our country. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) commented very knowledgeably on the potential legal and judicial impact and correctly pointed out that the UK Government have simply refused to acknowledge the issue.

We have had some interesting contributions from the Scottish Conservatives about Scottish independence; somebody forgot to tell them that we are actually talking about the European Union. I did not hear a single word from the Scottish Conservatives about why ending the free movement of people is a good idea for Scotland. We heard a lot of words about why the SNP is bad, why independence is bad, why the SNP is still bad, and why independence is even worse, but there was not a single word of justification for what the UK Government keep telling us was the single biggest reason for people voting to leave the European Union. I wonder why that might be. I wonder why they are scared to talk about the impact that ending the free movement of people will have on our nation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East (David Linden) made an excellent contribution about the huge benefits that the free movement of people creates for all of us. Those benefits cannot be measured just by counting how much people pay in tax or generate for the economy. The free movement of people and the exchange of beliefs and ideas is probably more important than the movement of labour, workers or anything else. People coming here from other places and cultures enrich our place and our culture. It will always be a negative, backward and regressive step to try to prevent people from doing that by asking them to pay to exercise rights they already have, or by putting in place some completely arbitrary, picked-out-of-the-sky number to limit who is and is not allowed to come here.

The single biggest impact of Brexit on Scotland is the one that my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran referred to her in her introduction. The Scottish Conservatives will try to hedge around it with the creative use of statistics, but it is an inalienable fact that 62% of people in Scotland voted to stay in the European Union. The hon. Member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk (John Lamont) was muttering at one point, “Have you seen the opinion polls?” I have not seen an opinion poll since then that puts support for EU membership in Scotland at less than 62%. I have seen quite a few that put it significantly higher—75% in some places.

Stephen Kerr: As my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) said, we were elected last year on a manifesto commitment to take our country, the United Kingdom, out of the European Union, the single market and the customs union, and to do so in a way that protects jobs and our economy. That is why we are here. The hon. Gentleman can quote statistics about the cumulative referendum vote in Scotland until the cows come home, but we were elected on that manifesto and are here to see that the interests of our constituents in our part of Scotland are well represented and protected as we leave the European Union.

Peter Grant: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point on a United Kingdom basis, but I gently remind him that we were elected with a substantial overall majority of Scottish seats in this place. As has been pointed out, the Scottish Government were elected on a manifesto commitment as well, which they will put into practice. Incidentally, his party was elected in 2015 on a manifesto that said it would keep us in the single market, so I do not know what its manifesto will be in next year’s general election.

As I said, 62% of the sovereign people of Scotland voted to remain in the European Union. We ignore that at our peril. If Scotland votes a different way from other parts of the United Kingdom, or if the Scottish Government and the UK Government, or their Parliaments, disagree, that does not create a constitutional crisis. It might create a political crisis, but a constitutional crisis happens only when those in power refuse to accept the will of the people. Clearly the UK Government intend to ride roughshod over the demand—not the desire, request or plea—of the people of the Scotland that our voice will be heard and that our links with our European partners will not be sacrificed on some altar of far-right ideology in a vain attempt to keep the Conservative party together.

Luke Graham: The hon. Gentleman makes a fine point about respecting the will of the people. Will he now publicly, for everyone in the Chamber, finally respect the will of the people in 2014, who voted by a 10-point margin, rather than by a four-point margin such as in the 2016 referendum, to stay in the United Kingdom? Here is your opportunity, sir—please take it.

Peter Grant: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has noticed, but we are in the United Kingdom Parliament. That is a kind of acceptance that, for now, Scotland is part of the United Kingdom. However, there is a legal principle that subsequent legislation always trumps previous legislation if the two are incompatible. What about the mandate in 2016 for the Scottish Government to give the people of Scotland a choice if Scotland is threatened with being taken out of the European Union against our will? Nobody forces the Scottish people to do anything. The Conservative party want to deny the people of Scotland the right to remain in the European Union, which 62% of us have demanded. In percentage terms, the majority to stay in the European Union was almost 2.5 times bigger than the majority to stay in the United Kingdom.

The Conservatives do all this fancy footwork—I call it the Maradona trick. They take the vote on one side in one referendum, and to back up their argument they compare it with the vote in a different election on a different day on a different question. I call it the Maradona trick because it would mean that Argentina were still in the World cup—Argentina scored three goals and Brazil scored only two, so Argentina stay in the World cup and Brazil go out. Totally ridiculous, but no more ridiculous than the attempts of the Scottish Conservatives to set one part of the electorate against another based on an election or referendum held on a completely different day.
The fact that the Scottish Conservatives turn up to a debate about Scotland’s place in Europe and spend most of their time arguing for the lost cause of Scotland’s place in the United Kingdom says it all. They cannot argue the benefits to Scotland of leaving the European Union, because there are none. The damage done to Scotland by being forced to leave the European Union against our will is even greater than the damage that would be done if we left on our own terms and with the will of the people.

The people of Scotland are our masters; they are our sovereigns. There is no absolute parliamentary sovereignty in Scotland. There is no absolute sovereignty of the monarch, nor will there be of anyone who replaces the monarch in the future. The people are the absolute sovereigns, and our sovereigns have told us what to do. Brexit threatens to deny the people of Scotland the right to have the country that they have decided they want to have. Anyone who ignores the people in that context does so at their peril, because the people of Scotland will not be kept silent.

The hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) shakes his head, with that smug smirk that he is so fond of.

Stephen Kerr: We are so used to your threats.

Peter Grant: It is not a threat to say that the people have spoken and will ensure that their voice is heard. If the Scottish Conservatives are afraid of the voice of the people, what are they doing here?

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Peter Grant: I will give way just once more, on the off-chance it is worthwhile listening.

Luke Graham: I will try to make it worth the hon. Gentleman’s while. I am still caught on the Maradona comment; if only I could rival those skills. Does he not realise that not only Scotland but London, Manchester and Bristol voted to remain? Should all the different parts of the UK that did not vote the same way threaten to leave? I do not think so. There are different views across the United Kingdom. Everyone should be respected, and not threatened.

Peter Grant: I am trying very hard to think of a way of saying, “The people of Scotland are sovereign,” in words of one syllable. The difficulty that some Government Members have is that the word “Europe” is more than one syllable, so some of the arguments seem to be beyond them. The people of London are not sovereign over London. I would argue that the people of England are sovereign over England—I am quite happy with that. England is a nation. What a fall from grace it is, in just over a year, for someone who came down here to speak for the country that they decided they would stand up for Scotland to say now that Scotland is a city, region or county council, but an equal partner of the other nations in the Union. The sovereigns of that equal partner have said, “We want to stay in the European Union.” If that choice is not made available to the people of Scotland within the United Kingdom, it will be made available to them by some other means.

10.39 am

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): As always, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this debate on what is a fundamentally important issue.

We are leaving the European Union—that much is clear. The discussion that we should be having now—although it has not been entirely possible due to the inability of the Tories to come to an agreement in their own Cabinet—is how we leave, on what terms we leave and how we ensure that when we leave, we do not suffer economically or socially as a result.

Before we get into the detail of today’s debate, I would reflect on one thing: if Brexit has taught us anything at all, it is just how difficult it is for the UK to leave a political and economic union that we have been part of for just 40 years. That should be cause for concern for not only Members of the Scottish National party here today, but also the Scottish Government and the First Minister. As the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran said, she and her colleagues have a desire for Scotland to leave a political and economic union that we have been part of for more than 300 years. I can only begin to imagine the difficulties that would be thrown up were people in Scotland to decide that they agreed with that proposition—thankfully, they do not. The SNP’s own confusion over the matter is laid bare by its recent growth commission, which ironically proposes to leave the UK but to surrender all control of interest rates, inflation and capacity to introduce fiscal stimulus in Scotland. What an absurd, worst-of-all-possible situations that would be.

There are three main areas I want to focus on: the constitutional, social and economic implications. It is undeniable that there are constitutional implications for Scotland arising from the decision to leave the EU. The Scottish devolution settlement was written in 1998 and our membership of the European Union is integral to it. A couple of weeks ago, we saw the UK Government shut down debate in the Commons, leaving a mere 15 minutes to discuss devolution. Not allowing one single Scottish Member of Parliament to speak was disgraceful; it showed nothing but contempt, not only for Scottish Members, but for those we represent.

Stephen Kerr: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Luke Graham rose—

Mr Sweeney: I am happy to give way on that point.

Luke Graham: But to which one of us?

Mr Sweeney: I give way to the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr).

Stephen Kerr: I point out to the hon. Gentleman that it was the insistence of his Front Benchers on holding 11 pointless votes that led to that 19 minutes of debate. We agree that it was shameful, but it was because the Labour party—his party—insisted on those 11 stupid votes.
Mr Sweeney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising that point. It is important that we scotch that myth once and for all—

Stephen Kerr: It is not a myth.

Mr Sweeney: It is a myth. Labour proposed to extend the time allowed under the programme motion to provide ample time to discuss all the amendments. I tell the hon. Gentleman that all 11 votes were necessary and vital. He might dismiss them as ridiculous, but they were essential.

Sir Roger Gale (in the Chair): Order. I would be grateful if the Front-Bench spokesperson would stick to the subject in hand, which is Brexit and Scotland.

Mr Sweeney: On the topic of the Scottish devolution amendment—

Luke Graham: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Sweeney: I am happy to give way.

Luke Graham: The hon. Gentleman is making a point about how fundamental the issue is and how important it is for the UK Parliament and for debates in this place. Does he not feel that the strength of feeling in his party is accurately represented by the number of attendees in this debate?

Mr Sweeney: It is a matter of logistics. My hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Danielle Rowley) was an observer at the Mexican elections and is still in Mexico. The shadow Secretary of State is at shadow Cabinet. Other hon. Members are at the Scottish Affairs Committee. They are all working hard in other forums for the people of Scotland, and the hon. Gentleman’s accusation is entirely unfair.

The Opposition realise that that incident of shutting down debate is not likely to be the only time that Scotland’s voice is shut out of the Brexit talks. It is definitely not the only time we will witness a fight between the UK Government and the Scottish Government. I would be surprised if we did not see the same approach taken by both Governments when it comes to the Trade Bill, the customs Bill, the agriculture Bill and the fisheries Bill. Each and every one of those pieces of legislation will have implications for people in Scotland and for our constituents, and we must not forget that. What people want is not for the Governments in different parts of the UK to be at each other’s throats, arguing about technicalities; they want the Governments to work together in a collaborative, respectful manner and to find solutions to problems. That is why we see the need for a dispute resolution mechanism to be formally agreed. I refer Members to the speech by the shadow Secretary of State for Scotland in this place on 20 June if they are struggling for ideas on what those mechanisms might be.

Constitutionally, we are in this mess because of the Tory Government. Their complete and utter lack of understanding about devolution has been quite astounding and astonishing to witness. From the original drafting of clause 11 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill, all the way through to the shutting down of debate, it is clear that they neither care about nor respect people in Scotland.

Moving on to the social implications, in December 2017, 150,000 European Union nationals were working in Scotland—5.7% of all people in employment in Scotland. Some 18,000 of those EU nationals work in the public sector, predominantly in our education system and our national health service, yet it took the UK Government more than a year to guarantee that they would even be allowed to remain in the UK. Even now, we know that they will have to pay £65 a head to stay in their own homes and continue to work in the vital public services upon which we all rely. It is an utter shambles. I ask the Minister a simple question: what happens to our public services if the EU nationals decide that they no longer want to be subjected to this country’s hostile environment and return to their country of origin, because without them, our national health service would crumble and our schools would grind to a halt? Have the Government made contingency plans for every eventuality?

We have not even got to the economic implications of Scotland leaving the EU. I made clear in my opening remarks that the Labour party respects the result of the referendum and accepts that we will be leaving the European Union. That does not mean that we are giving the Government a blank cheque or a free hand to negotiate any kind of deal they see fit. While we accept the result of the referendum, we must now focus on what our relationship with the European Union will look like. We have been clear throughout that the relationship must be a close and collaborative one that affords us the benefits of membership of the single market and also keeps us in a customs union.

There are many Tory Members who want to have a clean break from the European Union, but the Scottish Government’s analysis shows that Scotland could see its GDP fall by 8.5% by 2030 in a no-deal scenario. If Government Members do not like that analysis, they just need to look closer to home: the UK Government’s analysis shows that Scotland could see its GDP fall by 9% in the same timeframe if we have a no-deal scenario. I am not entirely sure what planet Members on the Government Benches live on, but that would be absolutely devastating for the Scottish economy. I cannot for the life of me see how anyone could advocate that as a policy.

I use this opportunity to issue a plea to Scottish Tory Members: it is time for them to stand up and use their leverage on the UK Government to ensure that the madness is stopped, and that we have a reasonable and logical approach to addressing the shortcomings of negotiations as they currently stand with the European Union. We have heard rhetoric about a deep and special relationship with the European Union for more than two years now, but the timeframe we have left amounts to a mere six weeks of negotiating time. I ask the Minister one question: when will we know what the UK Government’s plans are, from an economic point of view? Time is fast running out and the whole country cannot wait until after the Prime Minister’s Mad Hatter’s tea party at Chequers to get some answers.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) on securing this important debate. It is an important opportunity to reflect on a wide range of matters relating to EU exit and the implications for
Scotland. I congratulate my many hon. Friends who have contributed powerfully to the debate, as well as those who have spoken from parties across the House.

I turn first to our negotiations with the European Union. The Government are clear that we want a deal that works for the whole United Kingdom. We have built on the significant progress we made in March by locking down the text of the majority of the withdrawal agreement. Taken with the agreement that we reached in March on the implementation period—something that Scottish businesses have been very clear in meetings with me that they want to see—on citizens’ rights and on the financial settlement, we have now reached agreement on many of the most important issues. That provides certainty for businesses and individuals across the UK, including in Scotland.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran spoke passionately about the impact on EEA nationals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil and South Perthshire (Luke Graham) pointed out, we have reached agreement on the crucial areas of citizens’ rights. The agreement is fully reciprocal between the UK and the EU. The Prime Minister has said consistently to those people that we want them to stay. We have now reached an agreement that means that we are providing the certainty and the mechanism for them to stay.

Patricia Gibson: Whether an agreement has been reached or not, the point is that the hostile environment that has been created will drive EU citizens, who contribute reached or not, the point is that the hostile environment systems, and that the Scottish Government engage directly that Scotland and Northern Ireland have distinct legal forum, which I will return to in a moment. We recognise them last week at the second meeting of the ministerial agreement on the crucial areas of citizens’ rights. The future arrangement for co-operation with the Scottish Government, both at a ministerial level and an official level, into the work of the new ministerial forum, which I co-chair with the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). The conversations we have had so far with the devolved Administrations have been constructive and useful. The inaugural meeting of the forum was held in Edinburgh on 24 May, and the second meeting was on 27 June in London. We use the meetings to have

Mr Walker: There has been engagement—I have just referred to engagement at the ministerial forum—and I assure the hon. and learned Lady that there will be more. Although some questions about the withdrawal agreement remain to be resolved, our negotiating teams are working hard to ensure that they are finalised. We are confident that we will reach an agreement by October.

The most important issue for us now across the UK is to focus on negotiating the right future relationship. Jointly with the Commission, we published the topics for discussion on the future framework. They incorporate economic and security partnerships, as the Prime Minister outlined, the institutional framework that will underpin them and other cross-cutting issues. The joint publication reflects both sides’ determination to achieve a broad partnership that stands the test of time after the UK leaves the EU.

We have committed to engaging the devolved Administrations on the negotiations, and they have had input into the development of the UK’s negotiating position. I have appeared before three Committees of the devolved legislatures to give evidence on the UK Government’s preparations for EU exit. The Joint Ministerial Committee on EU negotiations has now met 10 times, most recently at the British-Irish Council in Guernsey a couple of weeks ago, which I attended to provide an update on the negotiations.

Following our commitment to increase our engagement with the devolved Administrations, the UK Government established a ministerial forum on EU negotiations to discuss regularly a range of issues relating to the EU negotiations and the UK’s future relationship with the EU.

Joanna Cherry: Does the Minister accept that the most genuine way in which the British Government could show that they are engaging with the Scottish Government and Parliament would be to acknowledge that the Scottish Parliament withheld legislative consent to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill and, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) said, to introduce emergency legislation to deal with that issue? All this talking and engagement means nothing if that single fact is not acknowledged.

Mr Walker: I will come back to the hon. and learned Lady’s point about the withdrawal Bill and the debate about legislative consent, but there is constructive engagement between the UK and Scottish Governments. I welcome the input we have had from the Scottish Government, both at a ministerial level and an official level, into the work of the new ministerial forum, which I co-chair with the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith). The conversations we have had so far with the devolved Administrations have been constructive and useful. The inaugural meeting of the forum was held in Edinburgh on 24 May, and the second meeting was on 27 June in London. We use the meetings to have

entitled “Scotland’s Place in Europe” on justice and home affairs. It clearly states in the foreword that there has not been engagement of the kind I described in my speech. Does the Minister accept that the first paper that I mentioned does not deal with Scotland at all, and that there was no engagement on the slides that were produced in May?
in-depth discussions about the proposed content of the UK Government’s forthcoming White Paper. Sections of the White Paper have been shared with the Scottish Government and the other devolved Administrations confidentially. I want to express my gratitude for the hard work of the Scottish Government officials who have worked with us on the White Paper and on other issues.

Discussions at the Joint Ministerial Committee and the ministerial forum have covered a wide range of areas. It is clear that we and the Scottish Government agree on much, including the need to ensure that Scottish universities and businesses have access to the best of European talent. We have also addressed other issues relating to attracting talent and skills. I note that the issues that have been raised in conversations I have had with growers in Scotland, including the Fife growers, about the importance of seasonal work are similar to the issues that have been raised with me in my own part of England—Worcestershire—by growers in the vale of Evesham.

Crucially, Scotland’s two Governments agree that EU exit should not create any new barriers to living and doing business in our Union. That has been one of our guiding principles and is a key priority for Scottish business. I have heard directly from Scottish business on many visits to Scotland of the issues and opportunities that EU exit creates for them. I have met representatives of a wide variety of Scottish businesses and business associations, including a number of chambers of commerce, the Scottish Retail Consortium, the Scottish Fishermen’s Federation, the Scottish Seafood Association, and of course, the world-famous Scotch Whisky Association, which, as a number of my hon. Friends pointed out, is very excited about the international opportunities to be pursued as a result of the UK’s having an independent trade policy.

The Scottish Retail Consortium said:

“Scotland’s businesses benefit enormously from the existing and largely unfettered UK single market”.

Its interests and those of sectors across Scotland are actively informing our negotiating position. As the Prime Minister set out in her Mansion House speech, we want to remain part of bodies such as the European Medicines Agency and the European Chemicals Agency, which are vital for organisations in areas such as the Scottish life sciences sector and the oil and gas sector, representatives of which I met in Aberdeen in April. I have also had detailed discussions with Scottish businesses about the global opportunities for them. In any deal that we negotiate, we must ensure that we have the flexibility to take these opportunities.

The hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran spoke about food standards and animal welfare. The Government and I are clear that we want the highest standards of food and animal welfare for the UK, not just to ensure that we can continue to sell into European markets, but so we can make the most of the opportunities in the wider global market and ensure that British and Scottish products reach the widest range of markets and represent quality.

However, it is essential to remember that four times as much of Scotland’s business is with the UK as with the rest of Europe, as a number of hon. Members said. Indeed, the worst thing for Scottish jobs and businesses would be to split from our United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said, we are better together. We want to continue working together now to deliver EU exit for the UK in a smooth and certain fashion. That includes designing and implementing replacement frameworks, which the Scottish Government agree we will need, where we have a significant opportunity to work together to improve policy making across the UK.

As hon. Members know, EU exit will result in a significant increase in the devolved Administrations’ decision-making powers. New responsibilities will transfer to Edinburgh, Cardiff and, once a new Executive is formed, Belfast. We have published our provisional frameworks analysis of the 107 returning EU powers that intersect with devolved competence in Scotland across a wide range of policy areas. It shows that there are only 24 policy areas, such as food labelling, that are now subject to more detailed discussion to explore whether legislative common framework arrangements are needed in whole or in part.

At the moment, foods placed on the market across the EU have common labelling requirements that are set by EU legislation. If we do not agree to continue a common legislative approach to labelling, it is possible that different requirements will spring up, which would increase production costs for Scottish businesses and discourage cross-border trading within the UK. Divergent food labelling requirements would make it more difficult to enter into trade deals. That is why we are working together to consider a common food labelling framework.

Our frameworks, which will be designed together, can be lighter touch and UK-specific, offering bespoke policy arrangements that will ensure that power sits closer to the people than ever before. As we set up those arrangements one thing is clear: the success of each framework will rely on the strength of our relationships. It is vital that we work closely together to put arrangements in place that will stand the test of time and provide certainty for people and businesses living and operating up and down the UK.

A number of Members have mentioned the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill—now the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. I remind them that the UK Government made substantial and reasonable modifications to provisions in the Act during its passage. Those changes were the result of joint working that we undertook with the Scottish and Welsh Governments.

As the Welsh Government acknowledged, the legislation respects the devolution settlement. We are, of course, disappointed that the Scottish Parliament did not choose to give consent. We will continue to offer the full provisions of the intergovernmental agreement, which was agreed with the Welsh Government, and to meet all of the UK Government’s commitments on frameworks. Those are open to the Scottish Government and Parliament. We believe that, throughout this process, the UK Government have acted in line with the Sewel convention. We worked with the Scottish Government to reach agreement in the hope that we would be able to achieve consent for the Bill.

I again thank the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran for securing this debate, to which there have been many valuable contributions. We recognise that Scotland has two Governments, and that the interests of the people of Scotland are best served when they work together. We will proceed in that spirit. The hon. Member for Strangford spoke powerfully about the
deep links between Northern Ireland and Scotland, and a number of other hon. Members spoke powerfully about the importance of this United Kingdom.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow North East pointed out, we have been members of the European Union together for 45 years, but for more than 400 years Scotland has worked with England on our international relations, and for more than 300 years we have been part of a United Kingdom that has served the people of Scotland and all other parts of the United Kingdom well. The implications of our EU exit mean that we must work more closely together in the years ahead.

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 10(6)).
chief executives get together, but they have no authority to bring the debate to a proper conclusion, the result of which, I believe, would be local authorities choosing the unitary route, with the support of the people.

For the financial case, I obtained funding figures and compared unitary authorities with those areas, such as Gloucestershire, that still have tiers. The demarcation is obvious. At the moment the Government seem to be encouraging unitary authorities because the finances seem to follow that trend. Under a previous Secretary of State—the recently ennobled Lord Pickles—the clear view was that unitarisation was not the way forward, but I am pleased that the new Secretary of State is much more open. The Secretary of State told the Local Government Chronicle in May 2018:

“There is a clear space and scope for unitary authorities. Obviously it is seeing where there is a need for that and yes, there are proposals on the table that my predecessor had been considering and I will now be looking at.”

I take that to be a green light. I am not saying that day will necessarily follow night, but the Government’s clear view is that unitary authorities are the way forward. Also, the simple fact is that I know of no unitary authority that wishes to go back to a two-tier form—bar Torbay, due to funding issues. The direction of change is obvious.

The finances suggest a change and, in a way, impose it on us. I could moan about how Stroud District Council has had no funding through the revenue support grant this year, but I am pleased that the Government have offered Gloucestershire the opportunity of the business rates initiative, so we have moved forward. Furthermore, that has demanded a degree of collaboration among our authorities, so the Government are pushing on finance.

A final financial point that I wish to make arises from the attitude of staff working for two-tier authorities. Unison conducted a survey of its members in Stroud District Council, and the figures were stark: 80% were not confident about the future of local services under the existing arrangements; none felt that vulnerable local residents were cared for safely; 60% were not confident of the financial situation of their employer; and 53% were thinking about leaving their job for something less stressful. Indeed, sadly some very good staff—the bedrock of local government—are being laid off. They have served Stroud for generations but are being laid off, all because of the cuts and because we have the wrong local government arrangements in Gloucestershire.

To come to the strategic case, the main problem is that with seven authorities, dare I say it, there is no obvious strategy. What strategy there is results from outside pressures, rather than a clear directional movement following decision making by the county council. The county council has severe problems. It is enduring ongoing inspection of its children’s services, where were deemed inadequate last year. I was pleased to see in the last letter I received, dated 8 June, that some improvement has been noted, but the county council is still subject to ongoing investigation. Yesterday, the chief fire officer resigned. I do not know the full details, but again the county council seems to have a degree of crisis associated with it. My favourite topic is the waste incinerator, which is being built at such great expense—£500,000. I argue that the case for the incineration of waste is entirely dubious, with regard to cost, environmental impact and health implications, which I shall talk about later.

Gloucestershire needs to move forward, to see how it can address its own issues by embracing change. We almost went through that process some time ago. I remember the Widdicombe investigation back in the mid ’80s. You might do too, Sir Roger, but other Members here might not even know what the Widdicombe investigation was—the Minister’s eyes are glazing over.

It was an attempt, under a Conservative Government, to look at how local government could be reframed. It was not about unitary local government per se; it was about how services could be provided differently. All I remember about the Widdicombe report is that in Gloucestershire we did not adopt any change whatever. In fact, it ended up as a bit of a bloodbath, with all councillors attacking each other because they felt that their authority was the most important in their area, and with no meeting of minds at all. I do not want to go through another Widdicombe report.

I want pressure from the Government, in the nicest possible way, to say to places such as Gloucestershire, “You have to consider the options now.” We know what has happened in Northamptonshire and what is happening more voluntarily in places such as Leicestershire, which is considering the options and what is happening elsewhere in the south-west, where there has been a clear directional shift. Councillors have been sufficiently grown up to recognise that the only way they can deal with the financial pressures is by considering some form of amalgamation, so that they can at least deal with back-office costs and pressures. In particular, it will allow them to develop a stronger strategic direction, in line with the way in which I hope the Government can see us going.

I have two questions for the Minister—I will give him an awful lot of time to answer them, but I am sure that he will not mind if I intervene occasionally to prompt him. First, without top-down demand, what is the Government’s approach to unitarisation? Are there finance and strategic service delivery pressures that the Government could bring to bear to encourage local authorities, such as Gloucestershire, that have been laggards in the whole process? Secondly, as a sequitur of the first question, if parts of the country refuse, for whatever reason, even to consider this option—not necessarily to choose it—what will central Government do? We cannot have a situation in which every other authority has looked at this and many have gone along with it, bar Oxfordshire, which I gather is still looking at some element of a unitary authority.

We still have relationships with our local enterprise partnership, which in Gloucestershire appears to be performing very well. We have a unitary police commissioner and a unitary health arrangement through the NHS, so why not local government? How do we do it? And if we do not do it, what are the Government prepared to do to help us do it?

11.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Rishi Sunak): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Roger. I congratulate the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew)
on securing this important debate. I very much recognise and respect his long-standing personal views on the topic, no doubt informed by his many years of service at various tiers of local Government, which I am sure he draws on today. He will have heard me say before that, when requested, the Government are committed to consider locally led proposals for unitarisation and mergers between councils. He will also know that we recently legislated to create two new unitary councils in Dorset, as well as mergers of district councils in Somerset West and Taunton, East Suffolk and West Suffolk. In each of those cases, the councils developed their proposals locally, as is currently happening in Northamptonshire, where a public consultation is underway to help inform the councils’ proposals for the Secretary of State.

Turning to Gloucestershire, there is currently the county council and the six district and borough councils, and adjacent to the administrative county there is also the unitary council of South Gloucestershire. It is important to state for the record that the Department has received no proposals from the county council or any of the district councils for local government reorganisation in Gloucestershire. I am not aware of any other plans in development that are to be presented to me imminently. The Government’s stated policy is to consider any locally led proposals that are submitted.

To answer the hon. Gentleman’s first question, it might be helpful for me to talk a little about the processes for unitarisation. There are two legislative processes that can be used. First, the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016 allows a process to proceed if at least one affected authority consents. This process was used recently for the creation of the two unitary councils in Dorset. Secondly, we can use the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as we are currently doing for Northamptonshire. Regardless of the legislative process used, the Government have been clear on what our criteria for unitarisation are and how the Secretary of State will assess any proposal.

I want to spend a moment outlining the three main criteria. First, the proposal has to be likely to improve local government in the area, by improving service delivery, giving greater value for money, yielding cost savings, providing stronger strategic and local leadership, delivering more sustainable structures and avoiding fragmentation of major services. Secondly, the proposed structure has to be for a credible geography, consisting of one or more existing local government areas, and the population of any unitary authority must be substantial.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): So many authorities are under significant financial pressure, as the Minister described. The majority of those named are smaller, more rural authorities. In that light, is it not appropriate to go through this exercise as a matter of course, to explore what sort of cost savings could be made? In Warwickshire that would enable us to understand what sort of savings and efficiency improvements in the services delivered could be made.

**Rishi Sunak**: We are here to talk about Gloucestershire today and not Warwickshire, but I will address the hon. Gentleman’s underlying question about the Government’s role in this process when I answer the second question from the hon. Member for Stroud.

The third criterion for judging a proposal is that it commands local support. In particular, the structure must be proposed by one or more existing councils in the area and there is evidence of a good deal of local support, including from business, the voluntary sector, public bodies and local communities.

**Matt Western**: To that end, rather than just getting anecdotal support from businesses and other organisations, would the Minister support going to the public with that at the time of an election or through a referendum?

**Rishi Sunak**: The hon. Gentleman anticipates what I was about to say, so let me elaborate on what the Government mean by a good deal of local support. The Government would like to it be assessed across the area from business, the voluntary sectors, public bodies and local communities. That does not mean unanimous agreement from all councils, stakeholders and residents, but it is vital that any proposals to change structures in local government are truly locally led. That is why we feel that a public consultation is so important.

That has been the experience of recent proposals, where the councils involved have used opinion services or consultants to engage extensively with the public through discourse, surveys and events, to ensure that they have captured the state of public opinion on the proposals they are due to submit to the Department. Having received those proposals, following an invitation, the Secretary of State must consult all affected local authorities that are not signed up to the proposal, and any other persons he considers appropriate, before reaching a decision, judged against the three criteria I outlined. The extent of any consultation would depend on the extent of the consultation that those making the proposal have already carried out.

It is essential that those making a proposal carry out an effective consultation before submitting their proposal, not least to provide evidence about the level of local support. The Secretary of State may then implement the proposal by order, which requires the affirmative resolution procedure but does not require the consent of any council.

Let me turn to the question from the hon. Member for Stroud about the Government’s role. He will hopefully have seen as I have been outlining the process that our role is to receive proposals developed locally in a particular area; it is not to enforce or dictate from on high the organisation of any local area’s affairs. It is for local councils and local people to develop those proposals. However, as he said in alluding to the new Secretary of State’s remarks, the Government remain open and willing to engage with areas that want to embark on this journey and will willingly receive proposals and adjudicate on them in due course.

**Dr Drew**: For Northamptonshire—thankfully, we are not quite in that situation—the Government came up with solutions, seemingly with the support of Northamptonshire’s MPs. Whatever the Minister means by “receiving” a particular idea, when do the Government intervene to say, “This is right and proper, and we need to get on with it”?
Rishi Sunak: To differentiate, there was a statutory intervention in Northamptonshire because of the situation that council found itself in. A statutory inspection was carried out and, after careful consideration, the Secretary of State appointed commissioners to go into the authority. However, Max Caller, who carried out the inspection, recommended that unitarisation might be part of the solution, which prompted the Secretary of State to issue an invitation. It is important to note that those proposals are being developed locally by the authorities in Northamptonshire. That remains a fundamental point: proposals come directly from councils, in consultation with local people. The process in Northamptonshire originated from a situation that no one would want to see in Gloucestershire—no one is suggesting that it is close to that, as the hon. Gentleman said. In that sense, the two counties are not directly comparable.

Turning to Gloucestershire, all councils should plan for and embrace the future and ensure that they can provide for their communities. I was heartened to see “Gloucestershire 2050 vision”, the extensive consultative exercise on which the county is embarking. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Matt Western) alluded to the need for councils to consult the public, and that is what Gloucestershire County Council is doing. More than 600 members of the public and 30 exhibitors attended the “big conversation”, the launch of the exercise in February at Cheltenham racecourse, where the council discussed its plans for the future to ensure that Gloucestershire remains a vibrant place to live, raise a family, grow old and, indeed, work and start a business.

Dr Drew: The Minister is being most generous in giving way. Of course, one of the proposals was for unitary local government, but sadly that was not one of the preferred solutions to Gloucestershire’s future needs. Will the Minister at least look at the earlier proposal and see that as a trigger for a proper discussion in Gloucestershire?

Rishi Sunak: The hon. Gentleman keeps tempting me, but I will keep saying that it is not for me to dictate to the people of Gloucestershire the appropriate way for them to organise government in their area. It is for the people, the councillors and all those involved locally to develop such proposals. Indeed, many ideas will be debated as part of that conversation, such as those I saw for a new cyber-park, a “super city”, a regional area of natural beauty and a water park to attract tourism. It may be that not everyone agrees on them, but the point of the exercise is to think about the best way to serve the people of Gloucestershire and ensure that their area remains a vibrant, prosperous, safe and healthy place to live. I am delighted to see Gloucestershire carrying out that exercise and wish it every success.

The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington touched on the financial situation, and it would be remiss of me not to respond. I pay tribute to councils up and down the country, which have done an extraordinary job of maintaining a high level of public services in the face of a difficult financial climate in the past few years as the Government embraced the difficult task of ensuring that the country lives within its means again. I am pleased to say that, in both this financial year and the next, the county of Gloucestershire will see a significant real-terms increase in core spending power, which is the total amount of money available to spend on its residents.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for Stroud for alluding to the fact that Gloucestershire is one of the 10 or so 100% business rates retention pilot areas. That programme, which will ensure that many millions of pounds in extra revenue will flow to Gloucestershire this year, was not available to everyone, and I know that the county is delighted to have access to it. Although there have been challenges in children’s services—it is right that those receive urgent attention—I am pleased to see a strong performance in social care in reducing delayed transfers of care. The latest statistics show that Gloucestershire reduced delayed transfers by 58%, considerably exceeding the national average of 35%. Indeed, its performance is now 20% better than the national average. I pay tribute to the county council for that excellent performance in tackling a difficult social care challenge.

First and foremost, it is imperative that the councils of Gloucestershire and those elsewhere in the country consider how best they might serve their residents, deliver high-quality services and ensure financial sustainability. Of course, the creation of unitary councils can lead to service improvements for residents and achieve savings, which may be of interest to residents. However, it is ultimately for the councils and people of Gloucestershire to decide, having informed views locally. If they so choose, it is for them to submit a proposal to the Government, which we will consider.

I commend the hon. Member for Stroud once again for securing the debate on an issue that he has thought about long and hard. I wish Gloucestershire County Council well with its 2050 vision and hope that the conversations it has with its residents prove fruitful, ensuring a bright and prosperous future for its people.

Question put and agreed to.

11.27 am

Sitting suspended.
Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair)

2.30 pm

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): It is quite warm, so if anybody wishes to remove an item of clothing, please feel free to do so.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered UK-Israel trade.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans.

Before I came here as a Member of Parliament, I worked in the mass spectrometry industry for nearly 20 years. The great pleasure of that was travelling across the world, from Cuba to Taiwan and so many places in between. It was an absolute delight in 2001 and 2002 to do a little bit of work in Israel. A particular highlight for me was working at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. While there, I had my first opportunity to visit a synagogue. The one I visited had the spectacular stained-glass windows designed, created and made by Marc Chagall, representing the 12 tribes of Israel. It is a spectacular vision in the synagogue, and it is particularly important to recognise the value of not only industry, universities and academia, but art and culture that we can share around the world.

Last week, His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge made the first ever official visit by a senior royal to Israel. Speaking in Tel Aviv, the economic heart of Israel, he proclaimed: "The ties between our two countries have never been stronger, whether in our record levels of trade and investment, our cooperation in science and technology; or the work we do together to keep our people safe."

The Prince’s visit to Israel last week was a strong symbolic sign that the relationship between our two great nations is better than ever. One can also point to the remarkable record levels of trade to see how tangible this flourishing relationship truly is. In his words and actions, I believe His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge captured what today’s debate is about.

Many people, as I did before my visits to Israel nearly 20 years ago, think of the country through the prism of its biblical narrative. They think of deserts, mountains and the Sea of Galilee, but the reality for many Israelis is very different. The Israelis have created a country that is every bit as advanced as Britain and the United States of America, which shows what can be done with talent and is creating its own talent within the country. That relationship is improving around the world and it is yet to do so, and we ought to be taking advantage of that as we look to the future.

Trade has been increasing and improving for almost a decade and there are no signs of it stopping or slowing down. Britain is, after all, Israel’s second largest export destination after the United States of America and its principal trading destination in Europe. About 30 Israeli companies are registered on the London stock exchange and about 300 Israeli companies operate in the UK, employing thousands of Britons.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. If necessary, I will certainly declare my interest, having recently visited Israel. Is he aware that Israel has the highest density of start-up companies in the world? There is one start-up company for every 1,600 people within the population. That is the basis of the economic success in the country and internationally.

Chris Green: Those are incredible statistics and they show the innovative and entrepreneurial nature that so many Israelis have and the culture that the wider society embraces. As I mentioned and as has been highlighted, Israel is renowned as the start-up nation—a true high-tech start-up powerhouse. Israel is widely viewed as a desert country with few natural resources, which is perhaps one of the drivers behind that, although there have been discoveries of natural gas off the coast. Despite the geographical challenges and some security threats, an enormous number of innovations and inventions have emerged from the country. Israel has gone from being a desert to the land of milk and honey, and now the land of Apple and Microsoft. Indeed, most of the world’s leading tech companies now have a research and development presence in the country, which is testament to the character and qualities of the people, which my hon. Friend highlighted.

The country’s prowess in the fields of high-tech, energy, medical science and FinTech is in large part due to the need to adapt as challenges arise.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an extremely important point. Does he agree that the extraordinary levels of inward investment into Israel by high-end, high-value companies
[Stephen Crabb]

in the tech space and pharmaceutical space demonstrate that when British companies do business with Israel they are plugging themselves into some of the highest-value sectors of the global economy, which is exactly what we need to do to make Brexit a success?

Chris Green: I agree entirely; my right hon. Friend is absolutely right. That highlights the connectivity and relationships that underpin so much of high tech, culture and the arts.

The necessity of adapting and developing solutions to the challenges Israel faces is a key part of its impressive start-up ecosystem. The culture of entrepreneurship and striving to achieve is reflected in the fact that there have been 12 Israeli Nobel prize winners in the fields of peace, literature, physics, chemistry, medicines and economics; I think that is a 100% record across all the different fields in which they could achieve Nobel recognition. Israelis will be the first to tell you that the Israeli autonomous driving company Mobileye was sold to Intel for a remarkable £12.5 billion and is just one of many success stories, including Waze, the USB storage device and internet firewalls.

As we debate here, dozens of Israeli scale-up founders are in London sharing their experience as part of Innovate Israel 2018. The event, co-ordinated by UK Israel Business, has become a major event in the UK high-tech calendar and is another example of how British and Israeli businesspeople work together every day.

Israel’s cultural exports are no less significant. Netta famously captured the hearts of a continent this year when she won the Eurovision song contest. Hers was an amazing performance that delighted all those who watched it on the evening and on YouTube or other sources afterwards.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): Will my hon. Friend demonstrate that performance?

Chris Green: I have been practising, but I understand that there is a convention against singing during debates.

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I am not sure that I would enforce that.

Chris Green: As a traditionalist, I will adhere to the convention.

It is no surprise that the first bilateral tech hub was launched by the British embassy in Israel in 2011. The UK-Israel tech hub is one of the first of its kind to promote partnerships in technology and innovation between the two countries. It has generated 175 tech partnerships in deals worth £85 million since it was established, and it has helped to boost the UK economy by an estimated £800 million. I have been to Israel to hear about this excellent initiative, and as we prepare for Brexit it is heartening to hear that this model will be replicated in other countries across the world, ensuring that Britain is well placed in the ongoing tech revolution.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that it is gratifying to hear that the UK has prioritised a free trade agreement and trade links with Israel post Brexit? The whole UK—all its countries and regions—should be actively involved in seeking the opportunities that will exist through better UK-Israel trade.

Chris Green: I wholeheartedly agree. As a Greater Manchester and Lancashire MP, I certainly want the north-west of England to participate in this tech revolution, and Northern Ireland certainly should as well. I was born in Ballymena, so I have a personal interest in that.

Other success stories that spring to mind include the landmark £1 billion agreement between Rolls-Royce and El Al in 2016, and I recently heard that the fastest growing Aston Martin dealership in the world is based in Israel.

The UK has signed countless agreements with Israel in science and innovation, and Israeli and British scientists work together every day on cutting-edge research. The Britain Israel Research and Academic Exchange Partnership is a significant part of that, bringing researchers from both countries together to tackle some of the world’s most challenging medical conditions and diseases, including cardiovascular and liver disease, diabetes and Parkinson’s. Each of these research programmes stands to benefit Israeli and British citizens, and no doubt many other people right across the world. That ought to be celebrated.

We should also consider that some 74% of Israeli exports to Britain in 2017 were in the medical equipment and pharma sector. It is undeniable that this relationship keeps Britons healthier, so will the Minister join me in restating the importance of this sector of trade, and will he provide assurances that it will be uninterrupted as we leave the EU?

Israel was one of the first countries that we began discussions with following our vote to leave the European Union. Last year we created the UK-Israel trade working group, which will ensure a smooth post-Brexit transition and is exploring opportunities to maximise further trade.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman talks about Britain’s post-Brexit trading relationship with Israel. Does he agree that the definitions in the EU-Israel association agreement, particularly in relation to the settlements, should carry through into any new agreement will clearly have to be negotiated on its own terms, for better or for worse. I think the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) was making related to issues of illegality, and it is unquestionably the Foreign Office’s view that the settlements are illegal under international law. Article 2 of the EU-Israel association
agreement provides that human rights considerations should be instrumental. Surely he would want that to carry through, irrespective of any other terms?

Chris Green: I did not quite catch all of the hon. Gentleman’s question. However, I would not want, in this room, to set in stone anything that will evolve over time.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): We have to recognise that strengthening businesses, businesspeople and the economies on both sides—in Israel and the occupied territories—is how we will achieve a viable two-state solution. Doing as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement wants, which is to discriminate against businesses in Israel without distinguishing where they are, will damage the economy and the interests of not only Israelis, but Palestinians seeking to earn a living.

Chris Green: Absolutely. The impoverishment of people, whether in the Palestinian territories or in Israel, is one of the drivers of violence. People who do not believe that they have a future sometimes turn to violence. We ought to ensure that, so far as possible, the whole region becomes increasingly economically successful.

Dr Offord: Is my hon. Friend aware that more than 500 Palestinians lost their jobs after the SodaStream factory in the west bank was forced to close after the campaign by the BDS movement? Those people will now not have livelihoods, but they will certainly have families to provide for. Does he agree that that was a disgraceful campaign against people in the west bank?

Chris Green: I think it is a disgrace. Forcing people to be unemployed and kicking them out of their jobs is appalling and damaging to them, their families and the wider communities.

Richard Burden: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Green: I will move on from this particular point: hon. Members from both sides of the House have had an opportunity to explore it.

I understand that the existing EU-Israel association agreement will form the basis of a future trade deal, but that there are great opportunities for further collaboration, particularly in the agriculture sector, in which Israel excels.

Iain Stewart: The House will shortly consider the remaining stages of the Trade Bill, which seeks to convert from EU law into UK law all the EU’s existing third-country trade deals. That will apply to the EU-Israel deal, which, as my hon. Friend says, will give businesses both continuity and the flexibility to enact the changes that he refers to.

Chris Green: I agree. We need in our ongoing relationships a sense of bringing down barriers, enhancing agreements that we already have and creating new and much more comprehensive agreements. Is the Minister able to clarify whether the association agreement will indeed form the basis of a future trade deal with Israel, and is he able to provide an update on discussions regarding agricultural trade?

I had a particular interest in science and industry before my election to Parliament, and I have a particular interest in Israel’s relationship with Horizon 2020. It was the first non-European country to have such a relationship, and in that sense the United Kingdom has something to look up to, to respect and to admire in Israel’s collaboration with European scientists on Horizon 2020. As we look forward to the opportunities presented by our leaving the European Union, we may look forward to framework programme 9—the successor to Horizon 2020—and wish to participate in that. Israel, by already having that kind of relationship, shows us what could happen.

When we look to the United States of America, we get a sense that the world is creating new barriers against trade and people. We ought, especially when looking at the European Union, to have the sense that right across Europe, the United States and the wider world, we are trying to bring down those barriers. In particular, we ought not to be promoting or increasing barriers with the state of Israel. We need to create ever stronger cultural, academic and social ties and, with trade being so important, to have the freedom to trade with countries around the world. We may wish to buy oranges from Spain or other countries, but I look forward to buying my first Jaffa orange post Brexit.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. As Members can see, there is considerable interest in taking part in this debate. I will not impose a time limit at this moment, but I ask hon. Members to show restraint and stick to four to five minutes in order that everyone is able to speak.

2.50 pm Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing this important debate and providing an opportunity to show the strength of the trading ties between Israel and the United Kingdom, and the benefits that those trading links bring.

Israel is a vibrant start-up country with a strong business sector, a strong trade union sector, through the Histadrut, and a strong co-operative sector. It also has a strong welfare state and excellent universal healthcare. The value of bilateral trade between the UK and Israel soared to £6.9 billion in 2017—up 25% on the previous year and still rising. Trading links bring mutual benefit. Thousands of people in this country manufacture products and goods that are sold in Israel, and more than 300 Israeli companies employ thousands of people in the UK, in areas such as high tech, finance and pharmaceuticals. There are very strong educational links between our two countries.

I will focus on one area that benefits people in this country: Israeli medical technology. PillCam is the first pill that can be swallowed to record images of the digestive tract. It was invented and developed in Israel. Babysense is a system that protects babies from sudden infant death syndrome. It was invented in Israel. I could also mention cancer probes, heart catheters, the bedside blood count device developed by PixCell Medical Technologies and the artificial cornea developed by
CorNeat Vision. All are positive developments that help people to lead a better life. Reference has already been made to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign, which advocates boycotts between the UK and Israel—it is against UK-Israel trade. I wonder whether it has dared to campaign against the use of those lifesaving products. I suspect not.

Richard Burden: I will not ask my hon. Friend about the BDS campaign, but could I ask her at least to endorse the statement in the Foreign Office’s own advice to UK businesses? It states:

“Settlements are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict impossible. We will not recognise any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.

There are therefore clear risks related to economic and financial activities in the settlements, and we do not encourage or offer support to such activity.”

Will my hon. Friend endorse that statement from the Foreign Office advice?

Dame Louise Ellman: Settlements are one barrier to peace, but they are not insuperable and not the only barrier to peace. The most fundamental barrier to a peaceful solution of this tragic conflict, and the key factor that prevents the setting up of two states, Israel and Palestine, is the Palestinians’ refusal explicitly to recognise the legitimacy of Israel as a national Jewish home.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): The hon. Lady is, as always, making a very well informed speech on this subject. Does she agree that the benefit of the technologies that she is talking about, particularly the medical technologies, is that they benefit both Israelis and Palestinians and people in Britain, and it is wrong to see investment in trading links in the field of medical tech, research and life sciences through the prism of an historical conflict? We should be looking forward and considering the potential benefits of future academic and research links, rather than looking at things through that historical prism, which is to the detriment of both Israelis and Palestinians, and patients generally around the world.

Dame Louise Ellman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Inventions and improvements in the human condition are about all of humanity and should benefit everyone; they are not about conflict. Trade is constructiv; boycotts are negative. The BDS movement is fundamentally opposed to the state of Israel, and partial boycott campaigns, however presented, are part of the same movement. BDS has not affected Israel adversely. Israel’s trade is rising, both with the UK and with the rest of the world.

Mary Robinson (Cheadle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate. The hon. Lady is entirely right to focus on pharma and on our trade links with Israel. I understand that in seven of the past 10 years the UK has had a trade surplus with Israel. Does she agree that we can build on that, and that it shows the strength of our trading relationship both now and for the future?

Dame Louise Ellman: I agree with the hon. Lady. Trade is beneficial, and it is beneficial to both countries; indeed, it should be international as well. I look forward to the day when the state of Israel and the state of Palestine establish good trading relationships with each other and with the UK, in accordance with the late Shimon Peres’s vision of a new middle east.

2.56 pm

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I should first refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, which I will spell out a little more fully in the debate.

I was recently on a trip to Israel with a number of Conservative colleagues, and it was specifically focused on trade and investment. I particularly wanted the trip to be focused on trade and investment, for two reasons. One is obviously the context of Brexit and Britain looking outwards to a more global future. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), who very ably opened the debate, focused on the growth in trade between Britain and Israel and the fact that Britain is Israel’s largest trading partner. Also, I wanted to understand the extent to which economic growth and development could at some point, when the political conditions are right, contribute to strengthening and enabling the two-state solution that I think we all want to see.

In the limited time I have—I will try to obey your injunction to be relatively brief, Mr Evans—I will focus on just two areas. First, when we were in Israel we saw a number of examples of its strength in cyber-security. The Prime Minister of Israel spoke at a science gala taking place on the first full day of our visit. He talked specifically about IT and cyber. I come from Gloucestershire, where GCHQ is based, but there are also a number of companies in the cyber sector. The work that Britain and Israel, and their companies, do together does not just develop business relationships; it helps keep both countries safer in a very dangerous world. Those companies work together to keep businesses and consumers safe from the threats from organised crime, but they also help our Governments and security agencies keep us safe from those who would do us harm. That partnership working is therefore very valuable.

Secondly, I want to focus on the specific example of a company that provides a good illustration of how business can help bring communities together. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West said, we visited the SodaStream factory. He mentioned that it had been forced to move from the west bank and that a number of Palestinians were unable to continue working there. When we visited the factory, we saw a company that employs Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, Bedouins and Palestinians. We met a Palestinian manager who travels there from the west bank. He manages a team of employees, including Israelis. I thought it was a very powerful symbol. There are people coming together, from a range of different communities, and working together to make their business successful.
One of the things that struck me about how business can be powerful was something that one of the Israeli managers at SodaStream mentioned. They had recently had a day when they could bring their sons or daughters to work, as we do in the UK. When his son came to that business, meeting his father’s colleagues and their children, it was one of the first times he had met Palestinians in an environment that was conducive to sharing ideas and furthering understanding between those two communities.

During the week, we spoke to a number of business people from individual companies, but also from some business organisations, such as those that further business development between Israel and the Palestinian territories. All of those business people were up for, and encouraging of, growing the Israeli economy and the Palestinian economy. I hope that the Minister will take away the message that Britain should encourage economic development in the Palestinian territories as well as growing our trade with Israel, so that when the political conditions are right—I know that they are challenging—we will have a thriving economy to underpin the success of a two-state solution.

I came away from our visit optimistic about the future trade relationship between Britain and Israel, and the prospects for growing our trade in the parts of the economy that will make both countries prosperous. I also came away more hopeful about the prospects for Israeli civil and business society to help create the conditions that will allow politicians on both sides to achieve the two-state solution that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) talked about. That was summed up well by the Duke of Cambridge’s visit, during which he visited both communities and spoke powerfully about the opportunities and hope for the future. I hope that we have more such visits, to help bring Britain and Israel closer together and to heal some of the divisions within Israeli society. I think that business can contribute to that, and I hope that we will see more of that.

3.2 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate. I declare an interest: I, like many other Members here today, am a friend of Israel and have been involved in the all-party parliamentary groups, both here and in Northern Ireland. I am an unashamed friend of Israel, by nature, choice and conviction. Therefore, when debates like this one come up, it is always a pleasure to contribute.

We have forged deep ties with Israel in cyber-security, which is vital not only for our national security, but for the private and public sectors. Israel is at the cutting edge of that industry, with Israeli start-ups receiving around 20% of global investment in the cyber market. I believe that we must continue our staunch partnership in that area. Israel has strong historical links with Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom. Some people joke that perhaps we in Northern Ireland are the 13th tribe. I am not sure whether that is true, but many people might look at us and say, “Yes, perhaps we are.” The main thing is that we have a very strong relationship with Israel.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): During one of our recent visits to Israel we saw how a university there had made links with cyber aspects. Is there not a great opportunity for UK universities to become joint partners on the world-leading technologies that are being brought forward?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I was going to mention education and universities, but he has done it, so I can relax on that. We can do something strong. Queen’s University in Belfast and Ulster University can be part of that partnership. Maybe the Government should be looking at how they do that with other universities across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Israelis see the UK as an ideal country to trade with. They are attracted by our culture, language and institutions, and by our honesty, integrity and business acumen. Those are all qualities that business people like to see, and we have them in abundance in the United Kingdom. I welcome the Duke of Cambridge’s historic visit to Israel last week and share the view that it was fitting for him to meet Israeli high-tech companies ReWalk and AlgoBrix, which have developed innovative medical solutions. They epitomise the start-up nation and we want to be part of that, as other hon. Members have said. I am also glad that he took the opportunity to visit the Palestinian territories because it is good to reach out to both sides and try to bridge that gap. He did that in such a good way.

In the light of the Duke’s visit to Israel last week, during which he saw a showcase of Israeli technology at the British embassy in Tel Aviv, what steps are the Government taking to increase the sharing of innovation between our two countries? There are many things that we can do, and I believe that this is one of them. I welcome the growing collaboration between our two countries and recent agreements signed to increase co-operation in the field of science. How is the Minister working to strengthen that relationship?

Israel has become renowned for its high-tech capability and innovative technological solutions. The UK and Israel share a close relationship in research and development, and there is still more that can be done. What are the Government doing to unlock that potential? The UK and Israel have a strong and growing partnership in R&D with British companies such as Barclays and HSBC—the latter launched a cyber-hub in Tel Aviv last September—but we still lie behind Canada, China and the US in utilising Israeli expertise. Does the Minister share my concern, and that of many other Members, that further co-operation on R&D should be a priority? Whether it is pre-Brexit or post-Brexit, let us get ourselves into a position in which we can take advantage of the opportunities to create jobs.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does my hon. Friend agree that the converse of what he has just eloquently described is the regrettable and reprehensible actions by a small number of people who advocate disincentives and actions against Israeli businesses, which disadvantages not only Israelis but Palestinians?

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend succinctly reminds us of the negatives of not supporting Israel-UK trade links, which can achieve much. There are opportunities, jobs, expertise and a chance to move forward.
In conclusion, Israel spends 4.27% of GDP on R&D, which is more than any other developed country. There remains large untapped potential in the form of British investment in R&D in Israel. Does the Minister agree that there is more to do in this area, and how will his Department ensure that happens?

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): I ask hon. Members to keep their speeches closer to four minutes now, in order to get everybody in.

3.8 pm

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate. I, too, was part of the recent trade delegation to Israel, and I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

For many years Israel has had a reputation for developing the technology solutions to many of the world’s challenges. For many years it has had an effective irrigation system to water a very dry part of the world. That technology is exported, particularly to developing countries that face similar challenges—if this heatwave continues, we might want to deploy that technology here. That technology was developed many years ago. Today Israel is addressing some of the new challenges in the world. We visited Gigawatt Global, which is providing solar energy solutions to many developing countries around the world and making their communities energy-sustainable.

As other colleagues have mentioned, research into cyber technology and security is now a key part of the Israeli economy, and we spotted many opportunities for deepening trade links between the United Kingdom and Israel. I will give three brief examples to illustrate the point. We visited a start-up company called CommonSense Robotics, which is innovating with a very efficient packing system for food distribution within a particular factory or unit, but at the moment it uses traditional delivery methods. There are companies in the United Kingdom piloting robotic delivery systems. In my constituency we have the Starship delivery robot, which is a fancy robot that goes around the streets delivering packages to people’s homes. I have put the two companies in contact with each other, as they potentially have a synergy of interests.

We also visited the Israeli aerospace industries. One of the most exciting ideas that they are developing is an autonomous electric taxiing system at airports, so that aircraft can move from the stand to the runway without having to switch on their engines. Cumulatively, that will save a considerable amount of emissions at airports, which is very pertinent to current debates on air quality.

My final point is more general. We discovered a sophisticated ecosystem in the new technology space, where academic and commercial bodies and the Israeli Defence Force could combine their knowledge for innovative new solutions. They have developed a powerful ecosystem of co-operation, which is something that this country, and indeed all countries, will have to take notice of. Individual sectors on their own will not deliver the solutions we need. Israel is already having that cross-fertilisation of ideas and solutions. I chair the all-party group on the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge corridor, and our ambition is to have the United Kingdom’s creative centre. I am already putting different bodies in touch with their Israeli counterparts to see what lessons we can learn from them. Israel has a long tradition of providing solutions and will do so in future. I very much hope that will be part of a deepening of UK-Israel relationships.

3.12 pm

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I refer to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I travelled to the Occupied Palestinian Territories, including the village of Khan al-Ahmar, last November. I appreciate being given a few minutes of the debate, and I apologise to the Minister if I am not here when he comes to reply. For that reason I will be brief and will make just three points that relate to the elephant in the room: relations with the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I wondered until the interventions whether we would hear anything about that from the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green), who secured this important debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) read out the Foreign Office position, which I am sure the Minister will adhere to, even if the Foreign Secretary sometimes does not. The position is straightforward, if somewhat illogical: settlements are illegal under international law, but buying settlement products should be a matter for consumer choice. There seems to be an illogicality in that. I do not know whether the Minister, the shadow Minister or the Scottish National party spokesperson will wish to comment on that. The situation is unique: a 50-year occupation of territory and Israeli settlements.

The principal governing treaty at present is the EU-Israel association agreement, which came into force in 2000. As I referred to earlier in an intervention, article 2 of that agreement makes it clear that all the trade preferences it bestows are conditional upon respect for human rights by both sides. What is meant by that? I can give three quick examples. First, the settlements are a transfer of population to occupied territory and are therefore considered a war crime under the fourth Geneva convention. Secondly, I referred to Khan al-Ahmar, a village that is under imminent threat of demolition. It is a Bedouin village on the west bank, which Israelis visited at the weekend preparatory to its demolition. I know that the Minister made representations, along with many other people, but that demolition would constitute forcible transfer and a war crime under international law, and demolitions are increasing across the west bank.

Thirdly, there are the disgraceful events that we saw on the Gaza border last month in which more than 130 Palestinians, including children and medics, were killed. Such use of lethal force constitutes wilful killing and, again, is a grave breach of the fourth Geneva convention. The EU trade association agreement could be criticised in that article 2 is not being enforced, but it is there at the moment, so my third point is addressed directly to the Minister. If we are in a post-Brexit situation—if we are—and an agreement is being negotiated, will those terms be carried across?

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Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On that point, is not one of the issues with the agreement, as pointed out to us earlier by the European Council on Foreign Relations, the fact that Israel defines the borders? We have the issues of the green line, the blue line, the purple line and the status of Jerusalem. If we are to negotiate ourselves, should there not be international recognition of what the borders are, not Israeli definitions?

Andy Slaughter: Absolutely. We are dealing with matters of law here, and there is a lot of picking and choosing. It is all very well for Members to say, “Well, there was a business in the occupied territories.” How would Members here like it if foreign entities were operating in this country without our consent, which is what happens to the Palestinians? The demands placed on business could equally be placed on the Government in negotiating a new treaty.

Dame Louise Ellman: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Andy Slaughter: I am sorry, I do not have much time. Companies should not carry on business activities in the settlements or with individuals in the settlements. They should not trade in goods originally from the settlements, nor provide goods or services that are used for the benefit of settlements. They should not engage in any business activity that contributes directly or indirectly to the maintenance, development or expansion of the settlements. Those are the criteria and standards we should set. Once we have done that, we can perhaps go on to talk about trade. This matter is not about BDS. It is about international law and our treaty obligations as a democracy that believes in the rule of law.

3.17 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I am just about to make what is my seventh or eighth visit to Israel in the past four or five years. I hope that I will see some more change; I have seen a lot over the past few years.

Like you, Mr Evans, I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. That is an important organisation in Europe, because it contains both the Israelis and the Palestinian Authority and is unique in being able to tackle the issues that they both present. I want to organise an exhibition in the foyer of this Chamber that looks at projects that are done jointly between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The problem is that there are so many projects to call on.

We have heard today that Israel is renowned for its high-tech capability. That is still growing. There is still an enormous amount of research and development to do, and we still need to move that on, but that development has not happened by accident. It has happened because there has been a growing self-confidence in Israel and a growing confidence among British businesses that have found a willing partner. From my constituency perspective, I want to concentrate on water management and the excellent approach to water conservation in Israel.

I have been to a desalination plant on the coast of Israel. Sadly, the technology that was envisaged for the plant had been offered to the people who live in the Gaza, but had been rejected. I think that is a great shame. Israel recycles some 90% of its domestic waste water, which is mostly used in agricultural production. By way of comparison, in Spain, the next biggest user of recycled water, only 20% is used for agriculture. Israel’s drip irrigation technology is exported throughout the world.

I agree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) about the boycott, divestment and sanctions regime. It affects the livelihoods of Palestinians as much as those of Israelis and prejudices the outcome of the debate; it is an issue to be tackled in the debate, but it does not define the whole debate. Where are the similar boycotts, divestment and sanctions calls in relation to the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus, or the Moroccan occupation of the controlled Western Sahara? We have a blinkered view of Israel in some sections of this country, and we need to overcome it by encouraging more companies to do business there.

3.21 pm

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): Like just about everyone else in the Chamber I want to draw my attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. I, too, have been to Israel on many occasions. One of the last couple of times was as an International Trade Minister—it is good to see my successor in his place—and the other was as a member of the trade delegation.

We have heard a great deal about Israel, including a lot of statistics, but we need to note the vibrant atmosphere there, which has led to its becoming one of the greatest countries for technology start-ups in the world. The combination of an extremely energetic population, national service that seeks out elite individuals for elite units, a willingness to support innovative technology and the ability to network results in Israel having the greatest density of technology company start-ups. There is one start-up for every 1,600 people.4.25% of GDP is invested in research and development, and it has one of the best start-up company success rates. As a result, extraordinary things are done in areas such as telecoms, cyber-security, information technology, biomed, environmental sciences and FinTech. All those are things that this country wants to take advantage of. They are the cutting edge of technology, and where we trade with Israel in those areas we will improve our productivity and intelligence.

We welcome those companies coming to invest in the UK, and we need to do as much as we can to help them.

As to comments that have been made about problems in Israel, only someone with a completely tin ear would not understand that there are worries, but, as we heard from the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman), the best way to get positive outcomes for populations is by trading with the countries in question, doing as much as we can to bring wealth and prosperity to Israel, the occupied territories, the west bank and the Gaza strip. We need to do as much trade as we can.

My hon. Friend the Minister has one of the best jobs in the world and works with some of the best civil servants that the Government have to offer. It is a great pleasure to see some of my former colleagues from my private office here. They work extraordinarily hard. My hon. Friend’s job is to go out and make companies and businesses wealthy. By creating wealth through the Department we can generate more tax revenue and, as a result, we can have more hospitals, police on the streets, schools and all the good things that taxation brings.
I shall not let the Minister off without a task: will he share with us the budgeting decisions that have been made about our Department for International Trade friends in Tel Aviv? As his predecessor I am worried to see that there has been a 9% budget cut for the DIT in Israel. The Government are under a certain amount of pressure, but is it not right to increase the budget for a wealth-creating Department such as DIT, rather than decreasing it, particularly in a country such as Israel?

3.24 pm

**Alan Mak** (Havant) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate. I, too, draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, which shows that in May I joined other colleagues on a visit to Israel, to meet Jews, Palestinians and Bedouins, strengthen the trade relationship between the UK and Israel, and promote my constituency as a destination for inward investment by Israeli businesses. As the House will know, Havant is a centre of excellence for technology, trade, investment and science, and I am pleased to say that, following my visit, a number of Israeli businesses are in discussions with me about opening offices there. I look forward to continuing those discussions.

The debate is timely, as trade between the UK and Israel is at a record high level. Obviously I welcome the visit to Israel made by His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge last month. Israel is the original start-up nation and a global powerhouse for science, technology and innovation. It is a key driver of the fourth industrial revolution. It has the highest density of start-ups in the world, and has earned its title as the start-up nation by, amazingly, having the equivalent of one start-up for every 1,600 people.

As the fourth industrial revolution accelerates, our two economies will increasingly be powered by artificial intelligence, big data, robotics, advanced manufacturing, precision medicine and other advanced sciences. I hope that the Minister will join me in championing Israel as one of the UK’s leading partners and will make sure that both countries benefit from the present exciting period of technological innovation. There has never been a more important time to strengthen our links with Israel, a beacon of democracy in the middle east with which we share strong values, and with which we can partner as the new technological revolution accelerates. It is vital, in particular, as we leave the European Union, that we take the opportunity to secure our prosperity by strengthening links with our most important trading partners.

As I have mentioned, last month I had the opportunity to visit Israel on a trade-focused trip with several other colleagues who have spoken in the debate, to see and maximise opportunities for developing our trading relationship. At SodaStream I saw Palestinians, Jews and Bedouins working together to manufacture products for export—something that will not only drive prosperity and increase trade but is also a good model for the peace process in the future. I also visited cyber-security firms that do vital work helping to safeguard both our countries. Israel is second only to the US in its number of cyber-security firms, and has a 20% share of the global market in that important sector—a truly astonishing figure, on which I hope the UK can capitalise. I also visited the Gav-Yam Negev advanced technologies park in Be’er Sheva, which gave us an insight into the spill-over effects in the Israeli economy, utilising leverage between the military, universities, civil society and the corporate world. Such collaboration was key to the cyber-park’s success, and I hope we can replicate that in parks in this country as well. On our visit we also had a glimpse of some of the medical innovations that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) mentioned. As precision medicine becomes an increasingly important part of the fourth industrial revolution, that is an area for expansion in both the UK and Israel. I hope that we can deepen our collaboration in that area.

This is an exciting time for our two countries, and as the UK leaves the European Union and the fourth industrial revolution accelerates, I hope that the Government will do all that they can to strengthen the trade relationship between the UK and Israel for the years ahead.

3.28 pm

**Damien Moore** (Southport) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate. I draw Members’ attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, as I recently made a trip to Israel with colleagues.

As has been mentioned, trade between the UK and Israel is at a record high, and the UK is Israel’s second largest trading partner. It is often said of trade, particularly now that we are leaving the EU, that it should be as free and frictionless as possible. How do we apply that idea? I believe that the answer is through technology, with partner countries that appreciate the same idea. Israel is certainly one of those. It spends about 4.27% of its GDP on research and development—more than any other developed country. I am sure that we in the UK can admire that, and of course we shall be only too keen to emulate it in the coming years, as I expect the Minister will agree.

There are many types of technology that can facilitate trade between our two nations as we lead digital disruption across the world. One of the key examples is distributed ledger technologies. Some Members may have heard of blockchain, which is one type of DLT. For those who have not, DLTs are the building blocks of the internet of value and can record interactions of peer-to-peer value without the need for a centrally co-ordinating entity. In that sense, value can refer to any record of ownership of an asset, be it money, land, commodities, or even music industry ownership rights. Its decentralised nature makes that data safer from hackers who could try to compromise it. As hon. Members can see, DLT could be something big that could enhance every industry, and if we seek to use it we will need partner countries that are as technologically advanced as we are. Israel is pioneering DLT with world-class projects in Tel Aviv.

It is important that we prepare the UK for its future trade beyond Brexit, and we must follow in Israel’s footsteps and put technology and digital innovation at the forefront of our trade strategy. I commend the efforts of one UK organisation, FinTech Central, which is working hard to promote the UK’s financial technology...
industry and ensure that it benefits trade across borders. UK-Israel trade is strong, and by harnessing the potential of distributed ledger technology, I believe it could be stronger still.

3.30 pm

**Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP):** It is a pleasure to sum up this debate on behalf of the Scottish National party, and I commend the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) for securing it and for the measured and well-informed way in which he introduced his remarks. I cannot say I agree with everything he said, but I compliment him on the eloquence with which he presented his case.

I have always thought that Israel is something of an enigma in the world. As we have heard from a number of Members, there is no doubt that the advances in knowledge and research that Israel helps to promote have the potential, and sometimes the actuality, to benefit humankind well beyond that country’s borders. At the same time, however, Israel is almost an outlaw; it is a criminal, and it is acting against international law every day of the week. There have been a number of serious, lethal attacks on civilians for which nobody in Israel has yet been held to account. Just as it would be wrong to completely demonise Israel and treat it as a pariah state, and wrong to ignore the atrocities committed by some on the Palestinian side, so it is wrong to talk about Israel only as a place from which Britons may get rich, and to ignore some of the human rights issues that perhaps do not affect many people living within Israel’s borders, but that certainly affect many who live within the borders of Palestine.

**James Morris:** I visited Israel recently and met the Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, irrespective of some of the obviously complex issues in that region, trade between Britain and Israel, and between Israel and Palestine, is a key lever for creating the conditions for a two-state solution?

**Peter Grant:** I will come on to that in a minute. There is no doubt that trade relationships can lead to wider relationships and be used as a way of influencing—for good or sometimes for ill—the actions of other countries and Governments. Today’s debate, presumably not by accident, is not about trade with Palestine; it is about trade with Israel. If someone applied for a debate on UK-Palestine trade, and enhancing and expanding fair trade networks between the United Kingdom and Palestine, I wonder how many of the people who were so desperate to speak in this debate would be as desperate to speak in that one.

**Mary Robinson:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Peter Grant:** No, I am afraid I do not have a great deal of time.

Although trade in general between the UK and Israel is to be welcomed and promoted, we should not get things out of context. Israel accounts for less than 0.5% of UK exports—it will not fix the huge absence of trade that we will have if discussions with the European Union go wrong. We could insist exports to Israel by a factor of 10 and it would still be only a relatively minor trading partner compared with the European Union and a number of others.

We must try to negotiate an equivalent of 40 trade deals in just a couple of years, if we are lucky—possibly not even that long. I must take to task the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who said that the Trade Bill will replicate all the current trade deals in British legislation. No, it will not. The Trade Bill will convert EU legislation into UK law, but the only way that the UK can replicate its trade deals with the 40 countries in question is if those 40 countries agree to that. This Parliament cannot unilaterally agree to extend a trade deal after we have left the European Union, and the European Union cannot do that on our behalf.

Although we can speak positively about trade with Israel in general, there are two aspects of that trade about which I cannot speak positively. As the hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) mentioned—I was very disappointed by the response he received—trade with the Occupied Palestinian Territories should not be treated as if it were trade with Israel. Indeed, at the moment, under the EU agreement with Israel that cannot happen, and when Gordon Brown was in office, he said that it would be an offence to take goods from the occupied territories and sell them marked as produce of Israel. I want the Minister to give an absolute assurance that after we leave the European Union, nothing will be done to land a deal with Israel that will make it easier for goods that have been produced illegally in the illegally occupied territories to be exported here. We should regard those goods as the proceeds of crime.

**Mr Harper:** On that specific point, the hon. Gentleman seems to be mashing two things together. The hon. Member for Hammersmith (Andy Slaughter) was talking about settlements, which is one issue, but the hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that we should not trade with any businesses based anywhere in the occupied territories. That sounds like a recipe for putting out of business every Palestinian-owned business, and subjecting them all to economic devastation. Is that really what he is saying?

**Peter Grant:** To clarify, I am talking about trade with areas that are under illegal occupation by Israel, and where Israel has illegally occupied parts of Palestine. I do not think that “settlements” is the correct term; this is an illegal occupation, and we should not be looking to trade with any business carried out under the illegal Israeli settlement or occupation—call it what you will. Plenty of other Palestinian businesses in Gaza and the rest of Palestine would welcome our trade, if only the Israelis would let that trade get through to Gaza.

Another area that has not yet been touched on but must be mentioned is the UK’s massively increasing weapons sales to Israel. UK arms sales licences to Israel have increased by 1,100% in two years, and in 2017 the value of licences awarded was £220 million. Israel is about our 45th biggest export customer, but it is our eighth biggest arms export customer. Consider what the Israel defence forces have been using some of those small arms to do over the past two or three months—it is time for those arms sales to stop.

I do not deny, and I would never argue about, the right of Israel to exist or defend itself against aggressors, and I would never argue about the fact that Israel faces an aggressor in some of the more militant elements within Palestine. However, children being shot with...
3.40 pm

Bill Esterson (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) on securing the debate and I welcome the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Graham Stuart), who is responding to his first debate as a Minister after his enforced Trappist-mono silence in the Whips Office in preceding years—I will not go into what happened before that. I welcome the Duke of Cambridge’s comments on his timely visit. He was right to speak about the importance of economic and trade ties between the UK and Israel, but it is also right to debate where we agree and where we have reservations about our relationship.

The EU-Israel association agreement has governed trade relations between Israel and the UK since it came into force in June 2000. It grants Israeli exports preferential access to the UK market, along with the markets of other EU member states. It was supplemented by an agreement on agriculture that came into force at the beginning of 2010, and by a mutual recognition agreement on pharmaceutical products that came into effect in January 2013. Labour would welcome a new trade agreement with Israel to maintain the same market access opportunities for goods, and to deepen a potential relationship in the trade of services, where the UK has an obvious comparative advantage.

As we argued in the Trade Bill Committee, however, no Government should have a blank cheque to introduce new terms of trade without first undergoing a process of external consultation with business and other stakeholders, as well as a proper process of parliamentary scrutiny. The Government’s delegated powers memorandum to the Trade Bill makes it explicit that all the UK trade agreements needed to replace the 40 existing EU trade agreements with countries such as Israel will be legally distinct treaties. Moreover, the same memorandum acknowledges that the powers afforded to the Government under the Bill would allow the “implementation of substantial amendments, including new obligations.”

Business representatives giving evidence to the Trade Bill Committee expressed considerable concern.

Bill Esterson: This is relevant, because the Israeli trade agreement will roll over, which is covered by the Trade Bill.

However, the Government have so far failed to confirm that they would inform business of any substantive changes to the terms of trade between the UK and its trading partners in the trade deals being negotiated to replace the existing EU ones. Will the Minister take this opportunity to reassure business that the Government will let it know in advance about any proposed changes to the terms of trade under which companies will be required to conduct their operations, so that they can have the required input into those negotiations before it is too late?

The existing EU trading relationship with Israel is predicated on an understanding that export preferences are available to goods produced in Israel only, and not to any goods produced in the occupied territories. Furthermore, Gordon Brown’s Government introduced labelling guidelines to ensure that consumers are properly informed as to the origin of the produce that they see in the shops and as to whether goods are from settlements in the illegally occupied territories. I trust that the Minister will confirm that that crucial distinction will be honoured in any future UK-Israel agreement. I look forward to hearing what further measures the Government are proposing to take to reinforce clarity on that point.
Mr Harper: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bill Esterson: I will not give way; I have told the right hon. Gentleman that already.

Will the Minister confirm that any UK-Israel trade agreement will maintain the existing clarity about the fact that market access preferences offered to Israeli exports into the UK do not extend to goods produced in settlements in the illegally occupied Palestinian territories? It is extremely important that we maintain cross-party recognition of the status of the settlements in the west bank.

The Government have consistently reiterated that the UK considers those settlements illegal under international law, and they have continued to speak out forcefully against Israel’s expansion of settlements. Last October, the Foreign Secretary expressed his concern at Israel’s approval of settlement construction permits in Hebron for the first time in 15 years:

“Settlements are illegal under international law and undermine both the physical viability of the two-state solution and perceptions of Israel’s commitment to it.”

We agree with those concerns about the occupied territories.

From the Trade Bill Committee, we know that Ministers intend to replicate the existing EU-Israel trade agreement exactly. Will the Minister confirm that that will also apply to the human rights clauses and that the Government intend to enforce those clauses once we have left the European Union? Will he confirm that the Government fully support the human rights of all those who will come under the ambit of any future trade agreement between the UK and Israel? The trade preferences granted under the EU-Israel association agreement are conditional on respect for human rights by both sides. Article 2 of the agreement reads:

“Relations between the Parties, as well as all the provisions of the Agreement itself, shall be based on respect for human rights and democratic principles, which guides their internal and international policy and constitutes an essential element of this Agreement.”

I trust that the Minister will confirm that respect for human rights and democratic principles will be an essential element of any new UK-Israel agreement.

Last year, Labour’s manifesto said that trade policy should prioritise human rights through our agreements with other countries. We reiterated the importance of human rights in trade agreements during the Trade Bill Committee proceedings in January. They are particularly important in the light of ongoing human rights concerns in Israel and Palestine, yet in February, in a written answer in the House of Lords, the Government stated that they had as yet made no assessment as to Israel’s compliance with the condition in article 2 of the EU-Israel association agreement that it respect human rights and democracy. Will the Minister assure us that the Government will undertake such an assessment as part of a due diligence process when they move towards a new UK-Israel agreement?

Concerns about human rights can dominate the public debate, and if we had longer, we could go into arms sales as well. Perhaps the Minister will comment on the Government’s commitment to the consolidated criteria on arms export controls and the review of whether UK-produced equipment was involved in the use of lethal force by Israeli forces in the last few months.

It is important, however, to recognise the potential for successful trade with Israel. Together, pharmaceuticals and motor vehicles account for almost 30% of our exports to Israel, so supporting those sectors is important. The jobs that they and their supply chains bring are vital to supporting communities, but if the broader trade picture is botched, both sectors will be at risk from the non-tariff barriers that affect their supply chains, due to the just-in-time nature of vehicle components and the risk of drugs degrading in transit.

Our relationship with Israel does not exist in a vacuum; it is directly affected by our relationships with third countries and the wider world. Trade with Israel currently benefits from the fact that we are part of the EU and from the application of rules of origin and regulatory alignment. This weekend, the Cabinet needs to resolve its differences and produce a third way that delivers the certainty needed by business about border arrangements and non-tariff barriers.

Any trade deal that the UK makes with Israel must include strong guarantees that democratic principles and a fundamental respect for human rights will form a large component of that deal. Our policy on trade with Israel is to support a progressive trading relationship that brings jobs and prosperity at home and that also delivers benefits to the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. Any future UK-Israel trade deal must be judged against those goals—

Mr Nigel Evans (in the Chair): Order. I call the Minister.

3.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Trade (Graham Stuart): It is a great pleasure, Mr Evans, to serve under your chairmanship on the first outing for this ingénue Minister.

I congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) for raising this important topic. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson), who served with me on the Education Committee for many years.

It is now 70 years since Israel was founded, and the UK-Israeli relationship is firm. In the last month alone, the Prime Minister has met Prime Minister Netanyahu, and Prince William, as has been discussed, has made the first ever official visit to Israel by a senior royal—one that was very well received.

That relationship is also backed by a strong trade and investment relationship, which many Members have discussed this afternoon. As of 2016, our total trade with Israel was worth £3.6 billion per year, with a £570 million surplus for the UK, according to our figures. We are Israel’s largest goods export market in the European Union and its second largest in the whole world. We are also a significant destination for Israeli investment. I will give just a few examples. British brands, from Superdry to Jo Malone London, are continuing to expand in Israel, and Israel’s largest investment house, Psagot, is now owned by a UK private equity firm.

British brands that are already in Israel are going from strength to strength. For instance, easyJet is now Israel’s second most popular airline for international flights after El Al, and 2016 saw the signing of our biggest ever trade deal—Rolls-Royce will provide £1 billion worth of engines for El Al’s new planes. The strength of
British exports to Israel is felt across the UK. For example, sales of Scotch whisky have increased by 245% since 2012. UK-Israeli trade is a vital component of the UK’s economic growth and we hope to strengthen it further in the coming years, including as we leave the European Union.

Last December, we signed a new aviation agreement, to make sure that travel between the UK and Israel remains open after Brexit. In March 2017, we launched the UK-Israel trade working group, which is designed both to maximise existing trade opportunities and to ensure a smooth transition of our existing relationship as we leave the EU.

As members will be aware, the draft withdrawal agreement text provides that, during the implementation period, the UK will continue to benefit from the EU’s third-party trade agreements, including those with Israel. We are committed to ensuring continuity for our existing EU trade agreements—that issue came up several times in the debate—and are working to transition the existing EU-Israel association agreement as it stands.

Mr Harper: First of all, it is a great pleasure to see the Minister in his place and, frankly, I congratulate him on taking an intervention and on giving us a lesson in how debate is conducted, unlike the hon. Member for Setfon Central (Bill Esterson), who speaks for the Opposition.

As we think about our relationships with Israel, may I just ask the Minister to ensure that we look for opportunities, notwithstanding the complexities around settlement, and that we give every opportunity to the Palestinian economy to grow and to thrive? That matters, because if we do not generate wealth and successful businesses in the occupied territories, we will have no hope of achieving a successful two-state solution, which needs that strong economic partnership between the two future states.

Graham Stuart: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Department for International Trade was set up precisely to promote trade around the world, not only to enrich this country but in the sure knowledge that trade and an open, liberal, rules-based system enriches everybody, and most of all the poorest. In places such as Palestine, which are on a developmental path, it is absolutely essential that we engage with business, and it was inspiring to hear stories of businesses acting as a facilitator to bring different communities together. I am sure he is right that, through the building of prosperity, security and development go hand in hand.

Mary Robinson: Will the Minister give way?

Graham Stuart: I really have very little time, so if my hon. Friend will allow me, I will not take any more interventions.

We are seeing our links grow on an institution-to-institution basis, such as the Royal Society’s co-operation agreement with the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities, which was signed in 2015. We are also seeing UK-Israel business-to-business links grow and grow. For example, Israel’s Orbotech, a microelectronics company that has had a Welsh-based subsidiary since 2014, last year won the Queen’s award for enterprise in international trade.

Any decision about the resourcing in Israel is subject to a decision by Her Majesty’s trade commissioner for Europe, and that will come about in due course. However, I will take this intervention as strong lobbying by someone with a clear knowledge of the importance of DIT that it needs to be resourced appropriately in the future.

I will turn, if I may, to the effect of the trade agreements on the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I want to be absolutely clear that we believe that the level of control that Israel has over the west bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza strip amounts to occupation under international law. As has been said, the existing EU-Israeli agreements do not extend to Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories, and we intend there to be a technical transfer of those agreements as they stand.

A particularly strong area of co-operation is science and technology, which is another subject that came up in so many speeches, not least that of my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton West who secured the debate and began it. The respective strengths of Israel and the UK complement each other. The UK has one of the world’s strongest science bases, with four of the world’s top 10 universities, and we are ranked third worldwide for academic citations.

Meanwhile, Israel—as has been said—is the start-up nation, and it spends 4.3% of GDP on research and development, which is the highest figure in the OECD. We are seeing UK-Israel business-to-business links grow and grow. For example, Israel’s Orbotec, a microelectronics company that has had a Welsh-based subsidiary since 2014, last year won the Queen’s award for enterprise in international trade.

Graham Stuart: I am afraid that I will not give way.

Mary Robinson: Will the Minister give way?

Graham Stuart: I am afraid that I will not give way. As I was saying, that comes on top of the existing UK-Israel tech hub at our embassy in Tel Aviv—the first country ever to establish a tech hub at an embassy. That kind of co-operation, as the hon. Member for Strangford and others have said, will not only help our trade; it will have a real effect on our nation’s health.

I have very little time left, Mr Evans, so I will just say something briefly on the subject of arms, which was mentioned, including the specific case of sniper rifles. Only four licences were granted last year for targeting equipment: two were temporary licences for demonstration purposes; one was to return an item to its Israeli manufacturer after tests in the UK; and one was for laser illuminators for end use by the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office. On the subject of sniper rifles, the UK has not...
licensed the export of sniper rifles to the Israeli defence forces. We have granted only two licences in the last decade for a total of six sniper rifles and magazines, and they were for an Israeli defence company to test ammunition on its own firing range.

With that, I will cease.

3.58 pm

Chris Green: I thank the Minister for such a positive speech and for dealing with so many of the issues that came out during the debate.

It has been an incredibly positive debate about the relationship between the United Kingdom and Israel, and about our trade, covering everything from agriculture to medical technology, and on to the fourth industrial revolution.

I will highlight something the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Dame Louise Ellman) said, which I myself might not have picked up on: the importance of trade for the trade union movement and the co-operative movement. It is so important that we have strong trade, because good trade is good for workers and I am therefore delighted to see the level of UK-Israel solidarity.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered UK-Israel trade.

Uncontrolled Shark Fishing in the Atlantic

[MR PHILIP HOLLOBONE in the Chair]

4 pm

Ross Thomson (Aberdeen South) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered uncontrolled shark fishing in the Atlantic high seas.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. When I secured this debate, it raised a few eyebrows. Colleagues asked why I had chosen this issue. I might already have a bit of a reputation in this place for campaigning on things that are cute and cuddly, such as domestic pets, so why on earth sharks?

Since first seeing the movie “Jaws” at the age of four, I have genuinely been inspired and fascinated by sharks. By the way, that movie celebrates its 43rd anniversary this year.

I am not sure whether this counts as declaring an interest, but I should state that after a birthday present from my office last year, I adopted a shiver of great white sharks through the Shark Trust. The Shark Trust is one of many organisations based in the UK and beyond that do excellent work on shark conservation all over the world. The adoption certificate scheme, which is helping to fund vital research and population monitoring around the Farallon Islands off the coast of California, is just one example of that.

Sharks are not just found in far-flung waters. In fact, 21 species of shark live in British waters, and at least 11 species of deep-water shark can be found here, too. Lest that discourage anyone from spending this glorious summer at the British seaside, I stress that very few species of shark are potentially dangerous to humans, and none of them has ever been reported in British waters. In fact, there has not been a fatal shark attack in British waters in more than 80 years. The truth is that sharks are not the aggressive, man-eating monsters of movies such as “Jaws”, “Open Water” or “Sharknado”. Sharks are essential to the health of our oceanic ecosystems, and they are a valuable part of our marine life. We must not allow the Hollywood stereotype that seeks to stir up misplaced fear to get in the way of necessary conservation efforts securing the long-term future of these remarkable and wonderful animals.

Sharks play a crucial role in the ecosystems of every ocean on Earth. They are key, for example, to maintaining coral reefs. Without sharks keeping the predatory fish population in check, there would be fewer smaller fish eating the algae that would otherwise compete with and kill the coral reef. Studies have shown that declining shark populations are already having a disastrous effect on coral reefs, which themselves are deeply important to the global ecosystem. Further effects of shark extinction would include algae suffocating the ocean, population collapse among species such as scallops, whose predators are normally the sharks’ prey, and disruption to the planet’s carbon cycle.

Sadly, more than 50% of shark species in British waters are now under threat. Take the angel shark, which was once common but is now critically endangered. It is only thanks to the tireless work of groups such as the Shark Trust that the angel shark is now one of the best protected sharks in the north-east Atlantic.
[Ross Thomson]

Let there be no doubt that this is an international issue, as well as a domestic one. All over the world, in every ocean, various species of sharks face a serious existential threat. The biggest contributor to that threat is overfishing. Every year, millions of sharks are caught and landed, even as shark numbers continue to dwindle across a range of species. Overfishing is fuelled by demand for a whole host of shark products, including, perhaps most infamously, their fins, which are used in parts of Asia for shark fin soup. The practice of shark finning—cutting the fins off a live shark, which is often then left to suffocate to death—is truly barbaric, and I am glad that action to change attitudes in China has led to sales of shark fin dropping by up to 70% in that country in recent years.

That progress is just one glimmer of light amid a wider and growing problem. Demand for shark meat already far outstrips demand for fins and is continuing to grow. Other shark products in demand include: shark liver oil, which is widely used in the cosmetics industry; shark cartilage, which is used as a so-called alternative medicine; and shark teeth, which are used as jewellery. The overfishing of sharks is not just about demand for shark products. Shortfin mako sharks can be found in British waters and are believed to be the fastest species of shark in the world. Bycatch of these sharks is leading to a serious decline in their population. It is believed to be necessary to reduce the north Atlantic mako catch to zero if we are to have even half a chance of allowing the population in those waters to recover over the next two decades. The International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas has thus far failed to grant prohibited status to shortfin mako sharks, even though that species has been found to be exceptionally vulnerable to ICCAT fisheries.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): I understand that the International Union for Conservation of Nature classes sharks simply as “vulnerable”. Does my hon. Friend agree that, as a result of the demand he has highlighted, it is clearly pointing out, further action is required to face an existential threat. From the movies we watch, that intervention, and I wholeheartedly agree. Sharks are not just vulnerable; as I have tried to articulate, they need a conservation, not less.

Ross Thomson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important intervention. I am hugely jealous of his having been able to swim with sharks off the coast of Cornwall—it is still on my bucket list to go cage diving with a great white. I know that many campaigners, including the Shark Trust, have been actively trying to engage with the European Union, often to no avail. He is right that when we take back those powers we will be able to do things on our own terms, and do more for conservation, not less.

I hope that the UK Government will press for commonsense reforms that eliminate the loopholes and, most importantly, make the regulations enforceable. On paper, a regulation can be as strict as we want it to be, but the important thing is putting it into practice. It is a matter of regulating smarter as much as regulating harder. I hope that after we leave the common fisheries policy and take back control of our waters, the UK Government will practise what they preach and act to preserve shark populations around the British coastline. We know that the EU’s record in this area has been less than stellar on occasion. After all, Spain and Portugal account for around three fifths of all shortfin mako catches, and Spain, Portugal and France are all among the top 20 shark fishing nations. We should take Brexit as a chance to examine what we can do better.

Overfishing might be the largest threat to shark populations, but it is not the only threat. Sharks need a healthy habitat to thrive in, so ocean pollution and habitat destruction are also significant contributors to the decline in shark populations. Microplastics, for example, are especially dangerous to sharks that are filter feeders, such as whale sharks, megamouth sharks and basking sharks. I am therefore really glad that the UK Government have introduced a ban on the manufacture of products containing microbeads, and I hope that will set an example to the rest of the world to follow as soon as possible.

The need for the UK Government not only to legislate domestically but to use their diplomatic voice for action on microplastics and ocean pollution in general cannot be overstated. Our ocean environments are interconnected all over the world, and plastic waste does not respect shortfin mako landings ahead of the annual ICCAT meeting in 2017, for example. I hope that they keep the pressure up in that area.

As the UK becomes an independent coastal nation with a large exclusive economic zone, we have a great opportunity to become a global voice for a precautionary approach to international fisheries regulations. We have seen the devastating effects of overfishing on ecosystems and human communities. It should be clear that the risks of more robust regulations are greatly outweighed by the risks of allowing overfishing, especially of sharks, to continue unabated.

Dr Matthew Offord (Hendon) (Con): I am delighted that my hon. Friend has brought forward this issue for discussion, particularly as someone who has swum with sharks around the world, including off the Minister’s coast in Cornwall, where I have swum with larger sharks. Is my hon. Friend aware that 86% of all the sharks landed in the EU are landed in the Atlantic? Brexit offers us a great opportunity not only to ensure that the species continue to survive, but to create an environment in which they will prosper.

Ross Thomson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Friend for that important intervention. I am hugely jealous of his having been able to swim with sharks off the coast of Cornwall—it is still on my bucket list to go cage diving with a great white. I know that many campaigners, including the Shark Trust, have been actively trying to engage with the European Union, often to no avail. He is right that when we take back those powers we will be able to do things on our own terms, and do more for conservation, not less.

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The need for the UK Government not only to legislate domestically but to use their diplomatic voice for action on microplastics and ocean pollution in general cannot be overstated. Our ocean environments are interconnected all over the world, and plastic waste does not respect...
borders. The same goes for action to curb climate change and preserve the temperature of our ocean waters from damaging, radical change. Both the UK and Scottish Governments have been world leaders on reducing emissions, but more global action is needed if we are to see real progress in conserving shark populations, even here in our own waters.

I hope that I have helped to generate some more sympathy for sharks today. I hope that I have demonstrated their vital role in the marine environment, both in British waters and in all the world’s oceans, and have explained why we are all invested in securing their future. “Blue Planet II” has contributed greatly to putting marine conservation at the top of the agenda in this country. I hope that the UK Government will now act to ensure that it is at the top of the agenda all around the world, and that that leads to positive and lasting change for the planet’s many endangered shark species.

4.13 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South (Ross Thomson) on securing this timely debate. I note that he has had a busy couple of days; earlier today he was in the Chamber introducing his ten-minute rule Bill on pet theft, and he was in the debate when I was in Westminster Hall yesterday.

This is an important debate. My hon. Friend is right that it is wrong to vilify sharks. The truth is that these are wonderful species, and the UK Government have always been a leading and vocal voice for the conservation and protection of our oceans and seas, and of sharks. Whether on fighting to protect whales and dolphins from commercial hunting, safeguarding the world’s coral reefs, or driving through new rules to tackle shark finning by requiring all sharks to be landed with their fins still naturally attached to their body, the UK has an impressive track record.

Sharks are one of the most iconic and captivating animals in our seas. They have been on our planet for at least 400 million years, making them one of the oldest vertebrate groups alive. They are a vital part of our ecosystem. They play an important role in maintaining marine biodiversity, and support the livelihoods of millions of people around the world. Yet sharks face a number of threats globally, from loss of habitat to climate change. However, as my hon. Friend pointed out—this is the focus of today’s debate—there is no bigger threat than that of unsustainable and poorly regulated fisheries. That is why the UK Government have continued to champion the conservation and management of sharks wherever they are fished.

We do not oppose the capture of sharks in commercial fisheries, but we want to ensure that those fisheries are sustainable, that trade is controlled and that effective conservation measures are in place. That is why the UK focuses its efforts within the international arena, driving forward global improvements through the regional fisheries management organisations, the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora, and the convention on the conservation of migratory species of wild animals.

Data on global catches of sharks is poor, meaning that we simply do not know enough about the magnitude of fishing. It is estimated that between 63 million and 273 million sharks are killed each year in the world’s commercial fisheries. In 2014, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation reported that, on average, 520,000 tonnes of sharks are landed globally each year, but some experts believe that landings could be three to four times higher.

Looking closer to home, EU member state vessels are responsible for a significant proportion of the catch of pelagic sharks globally each year, mainly blue shark and the shortfin mako shark taken in the high seas. The majority of those are taken by longliners targeting tuna and swordfish in the Atlantic ocean. Although not their target catch, those species represent an important and profitable by-catch to those industries.

The UK is not a big player in those fisheries at all. We have a very small longline fishing fleet operating in the Atlantic ocean that, in 2016, represented less than 1% of the total catch of the sharks. However, that does not stop us having a voice in the matter. We are a strong and vocal proponent for bringing an end to uncontrolled shark fishing thorough the establishment of scientifically justified catch limits, which are essential in preventing overfishing and avoiding stock collapse.

I want to say a little about the regional fisheries management organisations, because it is through these RFMOs that we are trying to introduce catch limits. One of the most important RFMOs operating in the Atlantic ocean is the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas. Over recent years we have worked very closely with both the EU and civil society organisations to ensure that a strong position is adopted in ICCAT. That has been challenging at times, given that several EU member states are major shark catchers in the region. However, in 2016 we were finally successful in driving through an unprecedented change that established catch limits for the north Atlantic blue shark stock. That was a milestone in managing shark fisheries in the high seas, and set a strong and important precedent. We are now working hard to extend that measure to the southern stock, where there remains some resistance.

At the most recent meeting of ICCAT in November 2017, we were again successful in increasing protection for sharks. Although we managed to persuade the EU to propose a limit on catches for shortfin mako—one of the species mentioned by my hon. Friend—sadly its adoption was eventually blocked by other parties. However, we did not give up. Instead, we helped to secure a compromise, introducing new rules requiring any live shortfin mako caught from the northern stock to be returned unharmed. Again, that represents an important step forward in strengthening the protection of sharks within the RFMOs, but there is much further to go, particularly when it comes to the shortfin mako, and we will not give up our position in future meetings.

We also continue to build pressure to adopt a “fins naturally attached” approach, with no exceptions, following our success to secure the adoption of that policy within the EU. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen South pointed out, one of the most shameful practices is that of cutting the fins off a shark before tossing the live shark back into the water. We have now secured almost globally the position that that is illegal. The difficulty is often around enforcement. The position that the UK has advocated for many years now, with some success, is requiring fins to be landed with the sharks so that there can be no doubt that the practice has not taken place.
We will keep working with civil society organisations to develop that policy further. My hon. Friend mentioned the work of some organisations in this area, notably the Shark Trust. I pay tribute to its work. In 2014 it launched its “No Limits? No Future!” campaign and report. I attended the launch, a year into being in post as Minister. It has continued to make the case for shark conservation and we have continued to support it. We will also continue to work with other EU member states, even after we have left the EU, and with other contracting parties, to build on our successes to date and to press home our sustainability principles, and not just within ICCAT but in all the other RFMOs where we have a presence, notably the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission—we are an active participant by virtue of our Indian ocean territories.

Looking at the wider picture, there is more to shark protection than just high seas management through the RFMOs. We need to look at some of the wider environmental implications. At the start of this year the Government published our 25-year environment plan, which sets a clear commitment to future sustainable fisheries management and our marine environment. Domestic fisheries policy provides an important framework for the protection and management of a number of commercially important shark species. The current common fisheries policy includes landing prohibitions for angel shark, basking shark, white shark, spurdog and porbeagle shark. As we consider future fisheries policy on leaving the European Union, I give the undertaking that we will continue to argue for fishing within sustainable limits and promote the protection of vulnerable shark species.

There are other regional agreements, such as the convention on migratory species and OSPAR, that provide important platforms for co-ordinated conservation action. The UK continues to support efforts within those forums to implement protection that complements fisheries management within the RFMOs. For example, in 2017 the UK was instrumental in securing the listing of blue shark, dusky shark and angel shark on the CMS.

Of course, the final part of the puzzle is trade. Demand for shark products can drive unsustainable practices, which is why we are an active participant in CITES and will continue to be after leaving the EU. On leaving the EU, the UK will become a member of all those organisations and will be able to build coalitions of the willing in its own right. At the previous two CITES meetings in 2013 and 2016, the UK was heavily involved in successfully securing stricter trade measures for shark, including for oceanic whitetip shark, hammerhead shark, thresher shark and porbeagle shark. The UK Government are also fully committed to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. That is why we are committed to a new UN treaty, negotiations on which will commence in September.

Good ocean governance is vital, not only for conservation, but to ensure that the UK benefits from the blue economy. The Foreign Secretary announced that the UK Government will develop an international oceans strategy to ensure that all parts of the Government work together to deliver effective conservation and sustainable economic growth.

Looking ahead to our departure from the European Union—these days, no debate on Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs issues is complete without considering the impact of leaving the European Union—there is a great deal that we can be proud of in what we have achieved to date. The UK has been absolutely at the forefront of promoting improved regulation of shark fishing, both in the Atlantic and beyond, and we will continue to do that. We currently play a leading role in shaping the European Union’s approach, but there are some countries that have commercial interests in shark fishing, and that can often blunt our approach, because we have to sign up to a collective EU position.

There is still much more that we can do to end uncontrolled fishing on the high seas. Our exit from the EU, while not dispensing with the need to build coalitions with EU countries, will enable us to build coalitions with other countries, to project our voice in other parts of the world where we have overseas territories and marine protected areas, and to ensure that we can still continue to deliver wildlife conservation and the conservation of sharks.

This has been a fascinating debate. My hon. Friend has raised an important issue that is not debated enough in Parliament. I hope that I have been able to reassure him that the Government take such issues very seriously and are world leaders in promoting shark conservation.

Question put and agreed to.
Child Migration Programmes (Child Abuse)

4.26 pm

Lisa Nandy (Wigan) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered child abuse in the child migration programmes.

Thank you, Mr Hollobone, for allowing me to shine a spotlight on what I can only describe as a state-sponsored system of child abuse. The former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, said recently that it was “bigger in scale, bigger in geographical spread and bigger in the length of time that it went on undetected” than possibly any other national sex abuse scandal in our history.

For five decades from the 1920s until the 1970s, more than 130,000 children were sent into care overseas in countries including Australia and what was then Southern Rhodesia. Charities, churches and the UK Government participated in the scheme, known as the child migration programmes.

Many of those children were physically and sexually abused. Children as young as 12 were subjected to backbreaking work. Many were psychologically tortured. Some of those children were as young as three years old. They were separated from parents and siblings and many were wrongly told that their families were dead. Children reported being abused in institutions in England before they were then abused again in institutions in the countries that they were migrated to. They were abused by staff, by visitors and by other children. Some were also abused in transit. I will briefly share two of their stories.

It is impossible to understand the full horror of this period in our history without hearing some of what happened. I apologise in advance, because it is extremely distressing.

Marcelle O’Brien was only four years old when she was migrated to Australia by Fairbridge. She was bullied. She was locked in cupboards. She was mentally abused. She was sexually assaulted and repeatedly raped by a succession of men. Like so many others, she continued to live with the horror of what had happened until well into adulthood, suffering mental breakdown and periods of manic depression. It was only when she found the Child Migrants Trust that she felt able to talk about what had happened.

Michael O’Donoghue recounted his horrific experiences at the hands of Christian Brothers in Clontarf in Western Australia. He was beaten. He was raped. He endured electric shock treatment. Along with 15 other children, he was forced to watch their pet horse murdered in front of them on what was known as “special punishment day”—one of a series of regular collective punishment days that those children had to endure.

What has since emerged is how many warnings were overlooked, ignored and covered up. For decades, successive Governments ignored those warnings and continued to send children to harm.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): The hon. Lady is telling some very powerful stories. Has she come across the Lanzarote convention, which was produced by the Council of Europe and signed by the British Government in March, and is she aware of the work the Council of Europe has been doing to highlight the problem of child abuse among refugees? I think that would help her case enormously.

Lisa Nandy: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman for attending this debate and for raising that point. One of the reasons why it was important for me to bring this issue to the House for the first time for a full debate is that many Members have a strong interest in this area and in pursuing justice for the affected families. It is important that those suggestions are heard, and I hope the Minister has heard them.

Like Marcelle O’Brien, many of those who survived that horrendous period are still living with the consequences. Four years ago, the Prime Minister—then the Home Secretary—commissioned an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse. MPs from various parties, including me, welcomed that decision. The inquiry’s first full report is on this subject, and it is damning.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this issue to Westminster Hall. It is a pity that there are not more Members here to contribute, but I commend her for leading the charge. Does she agree that, given that every child migrant was exposed to an equal level of risk due to the failings in the system she has referred to, they must all be entitled to an equal level of redress?

Lisa Nandy: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s interest in this issue. Although I agree that it would be great to see more Members of Parliament in the Chamber, one of the problems is that this issue did not get the coverage or attention it deserves until relatively recently. I hope that by bringing it to the House, I will help more Members to understand what is happening and more survivors to come forward so we can start to see action, which is long overdue. The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point: the report recommends equal compensation for equal risk. I have no desire to see survivors and victims have to prove what happened to them and recount those horrific stories again. The report was absolutely right to make that recommendation, and I would be grateful if the Minister could respond to it.

I mentioned the first full report from the wide-ranging, comprehensive inquiry into child sexual abuse. It acknowledges the role of churches and charities in causing harm to children, but it concludes that the British Government were primarily to blame for the continued existence of child migration programmes after the second world war. They failed to act, even when warned about allegations of sexual abuse. The report is devastating in its conclusion that “the main reason for HMG’s failure to act was the politics of the day, which were consistently prioritised over the welfare of children.”

The Government did not want to risk their relations with Australia or to offend the voluntary societies that participated in the scheme. Ministers in successive Governments were cowed by the patronage and power of those who were involved in the schemes.

Despite that, the children were stronger. The truth began to emerge more than 30 years ago, thanks to their determination and courage. Even in the face of their bravery, successive Governments failed to accept responsibility. As the current Government recently
acknowledged, the UK Government continued to maintain that it was a matter for the Australian Government until well into the 2000s. It is only because of the Child Migrants Trust, led by Dr Margaret Humphreys, who has rightly been described as the “conscience of Britain” on this important human rights issue, and a number of brave and persistent survivors here and across the world, many of whom will be watching this debate with interest today—some have had to stay up quite late to do so—that this became a matter of public attention that is still being pursued now.

The report of the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse was published four months ago. It recognised the importance of the public apology made by Gordon Brown in one of his last acts as Prime Minister, and of the family restoration fund, for which he and Andy Burnham, the then Health Secretary, found £6 million, and which has enabled more than 1,000 people to be reunited with their families. The current Government have since announced an additional £2 million for that fund, for which I am grateful. It is very welcome. I will return to that subject in a moment.

The report made just three recommendations: that the sending institutions that have failed to apologise publicly and in person to the children abused in their care do so; that all institutions that sent children abroad put in place robust systems for retaining and preserving easily accessible records of individual child migrants; and, finally, that adequate financial redress be made to the more than 2,000 surviving former child migrants. It also made it clear that this is urgent—many have died and others are dying, and it was unequivocal that the scheme must be up and running within 12 months.

In the four months since that urgent, devastating report was published, the silence from the Government has been deafening. Confusion about which Department is responsible has reigned. The Home Office made a short statement in March, when the report was published. The Department of Health and Social Care later responded to written questions. After four weeks of back-and-forth between those two Departments, I resorted to raising a point of order in the Chamber. In response, I was told that I could seek to raise the matter with the Prime Minister, which I did. I had to resort to going to the Prime Minister a month after the report was published just to get clarity from the Government about which Department is responsible. Four months on and multiple attempts later, the Government are still no clearer about their response and have still not told us when it will be made.

I am not the only one who has hit this brick wall. The Australian law firm Hugh James, which acts for former child migrants, shared with me a letter it sent to the Health Secretary. It said:

“We hand delivered a letter concerning this matter to the FCO on 26 April 2018. We served the enclosed letter on the Prime Minister’s Office on 29 May 2018. On 5 June 2018 we were informed by the Prime Minister’s Office that both of our letters were passed to your department. We are disappointed we are yet to receive a response from you and we ask you to contact us as soon as possible.”

That was two weeks ago. I ask the Minister, when will that firm get a reply on behalf of those former child migrants?

I want to say something really serious to the Minister today. The Child Migrants Trust tells me that, in the time that the Government have sat on the report, 10 former child migrants have died. Ten people died not knowing whether the Government will now draw a line under one of the darkest periods of our history, and whether they are committed to truth, redress, justice, and learning lessons to ensure this never happens again. That is the legacy those people deserve. Still now, the state, which did so much harm to them at the beginning of their lives, continues to do harm to them all the way through until their death. That cannot go on.

Will the Minister explain the reason for the delay within Government? Will she assure us that this is now the highest priority and is being dealt with a matter of urgency? As well as being a clear question of justice, this goes to the heart of whether any of us can have confidence in the child sex abuse inquiry that the Prime Minister established. She told the House when she set up the inquiry that she believed it to be essential that the lessons that come out are not only learned but acted upon. As the Minister knows, the inquiry has been beset by problems since. It has been through four chairs and has faced serious allegations of misconduct. It has cost £64 million so far—the costs are rising—and has lost the confidence of many victims’ and survivors’ groups, which have walked away over that time. Many, however, continue to invest time and energy in the inquiry, because they hope that it will make a difference. That first report must have been a sign of encouragement to them that the inquiry would not shy away from asking the difficult questions and telling the truth.

Now the Government must show that they are serious about taking action, and get on with doing so. It has been four months, and at least 10 people have died in that time, so will the Minister tell us today, do the Government accept the report’s three clear recommendations? If she cannot tell us today, will she at least commit to a full and formal response to the report before the summer recess? That request comes directly from child migrant groups, and I would be grateful for a clear answer.

The inquiry made huge progress in ensuring that apologies were made. Many organisations, including the Children’s Society, where I once worked, took the opportunity afforded to make a welcome but long-overdue apology. Will the Minister tell us, however, what progress has been made to ensure that the records are kept and made available? I have been told that the Prince’s Trust—it took over Fairbridge, which was involved in the child migration programmes—has not yet made all its records available. Have the Government contacted the agencies listed in the report to ensure that such measures are in place? What has been the response of those agencies? If the Government have not yet done that, will she commit today to doing so?

What progress has the Minister made on the question of financial redress? Has she assessed the numbers of those who might qualify? Has she done a scoping exercise to determine potential costs? In the past four months, what discussions have the Government had with the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse and the Child Migrants Trust about implementing the recommendations? Does she accept the principle, mentioned
by the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), of equal compensation because children were exposed to equal risk?

Let me compare the UK Government’s response and their position with Australia’s. In December 2017, a royal commission in Australia published the results of its five-year investigation into child abuse and recommended a national redress scheme. Within two months the Prime Minister had responded and set a deadline of 1 July. Legislation was fast-tracked through Parliament last month, and the scheme began accepting applications on Sunday, as promised. The scheme offers not only monetary payments but access to counselling and a direct personal response. Survivors who are elderly or ill will be fast-tracked but, in any case, the promise has been made that claims will be processed within weeks. Redress payments will not be taxed. The average payment is expected to be about £42,000 in our money.

Surely it should shame us that the country the child migrants were sent to is responding, but not the country that sent them there—the country that was responsible for their care and welfare at the time. How can it be right that the Australian Prime Minister can respond to a report with 409 recommendations in only two months, but our Prime Minister cannot respond to a report with only three recommendations in more than double that time? Has the Minister made contact with Ministers and officials in Australia to understand how they established that scheme and to learn the lessons? Will she tell me today that the Government at least accept the principle of financial redress? Will she confirm that a scheme will be set up and running by March next year, as per the ICSCA’s recommendation?

The Minister is aware that when Gordon Brown made a formal apology in 2010, the full extent of the abuse was not known. He and many of the survivors therefore believe that a full apology is overdue. In this matter, I have to disagree with the conclusion of the independent inquiry’s report—not to recommend a further apology—because the harms caused by the migrant programmes are many and complex. That is why it matters that we recognise not simply the harm done to children by separating them from their families and countries, but the additional sexual, physical and emotional abuse laid bare so starkly by the report and the harm of our failure to confront it over successive Governments and many decades. Will the Minister commit to that today, or at the very least provide us with a date by which time the Prime Minister will respond to that specific request?

Another pressing need is a commitment to continue the family restoration fund beyond 2019. One thousand people remain to be reunited with their families, and there is a waiting list. I welcome the Government’s commitment so far, and the £2 million that they made available to the fund, but its continuation is of central importance. Many of the mums and dads of the former child migrants went to their graves not knowing what had happened to their children or even whether they were dead or alive. They never found out that they had become grandparents, and they never saw or got to hold their children ever again.

The family restoration fund has enabled some of those deep wounds at least to start to heal, and important work remains to be done before it is too late. The

Minister knows, as I do—as we all do—that many of the former child migrants have died and that others are seriously ill and dying. Every day counts. The fund will enable nothing less than a restoration to families of the rights stripped away from them many decades ago. Will she give us a commitment that the fund will be continued until all the former child migrants have been able to seek to be reunited with their families?

This has been one of the most shameful episodes in British history. For 30 years we have known about the scandal but failed to act. The harm that was done then is compounded by our knowledge that it continues to cause harm to people in this country and across the world, yet still nothing is done. The secretary of the International Association of former Child Migrants and their Families, Harold Haig, put it movingly when he said on the day of the formal apology by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, that “our thoughts are with those child migrants who have died and particularly those who ended their lives because the wounds were too deep and too painful”.

At least 10 people have died that we know of since the report was published four months ago. I hope that the Minister will tell us today that no more will die suffering harm from the British Government, and that we shall finally deal with one of the darkest periods in our history.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Lisa Nandy will have some minutes at the end of the debate to sum up. I call John Howell, but, in doing so, given all the blowers on in the Chamber this afternoon, I stress the need for the hon. Gentleman to raise his voice, so that I can hear and, more importantly, so that Hansard can record his words faithfully.

4.47 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Thank you, Mr Hollobone. Am I sufficiently loud for you?

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair) indicated assent.

John Howell: Great. Let me keep it at that level and say what a pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I wanted to pick up on my intervention, which the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) kindly took, and to raise an issue that has troubled us greatly at the Council of Europe. We are members of the Council of Europe and we shall still be so after Brexit. It is an important body. The convention that I mentioned is the convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, which is known colloquially as the Lanzarote convention.

The convention is important because the one thing that it requires above all is the criminalisation of sexual offences against children. It requires countries that have signed it to ensure that they have in law the necessary criminalisation of such sexual offences. It applies to Europe and to states beyond Europe. Its purpose is to protect child victims and to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted. Those two things go together well. Forty-seven members of the Council of Europe have signed the convention—there are only 47 members of the Council of Europe, so all members have signed it—and 44 have ratified it. I think we ratified it in March this year.
We are very concerned about the sexual abuse of child migrants. If the hon. Lady looks at the Council of Europe website, she will see a huge raft of discussions and papers that have been produced on this subject, which will contribute strongly to her case. We have approached this from a human rights position, trying to protect the human rights of the children involved. The Council of Europe is the premier human rights organisation in Europe. What came out of the production of the convention was that this should be a political priority in every country that has signed and ratified the convention.

I leave that as an explanation of my earlier intervention on the hon. Lady and of how this may help. It is also an indication to the Minister of how we are actively pursuing every country that has signed and ratified the convention.

The pattern that emerges in the reports is similar. Many had already suffered forms of abuse in institutions on these shores. The process of selection itself was a form of abuse. Overwhelmingly they were being separated from family and they were often lied to about what had happened to their family members or even their own identity. The views of the children and their parents were ignored. Many were abused in transit and many more were abused on arrival in Australia and other destinations. Thousands of children suffered that fate.

Both the IICSA and the Northern Ireland inquiry reports remind us that there is no substitute for the testimony of those who were put through this awful process—we have already heard that from the hon. Lady. It is only because of the courageous testimony of survivors that their reports are so thorough and comprehensive. I pay tribute to all those witnesses and to the Child Migrants’ Trust for supporting them through the process.

The Northern Ireland report highlighted this particular passage as typical of what all survivors of this process would say:

“We were exported to Australia like little baby convicts. It is hard to understand why they did it. I know the theory—to populate Australia. I still cannot get over the fact that I was taken away from a family I never got the chance to know. I was treated like an object, taken from one place to another. I found it very hard to show affection to my children when they were young. I have improved as the years have gone on. I have a nightmare every night of my life. I relive my past and am happy when daylight comes.”

That witness died before he could sign his witness statement, which emphasises the hon. Lady’s point about the urgency of a response from the Government, especially in the light of the 10 deaths since the IICSA report.

As has been said, successive Governments were outrageously slow to respond. The hon. Lady already emphasised the IICSA’s conclusion, which states:

“It is the overwhelming conclusion of the Inquiry that the institution primarily to blame for the continued existence of the child migration programmes after the Second World War was Her Majesty’s Government”.

The programmes were “allowed by successive British governments to remain in place, despite a catalogue of evidence which showed that children were suffering ill-treatment and abuse, including sexual abuse.”

That continued even after the damning Ross report of 1956. It is stomach churning to read in the IICSA report that that was because, as the hon. Lady said, politics trumped child welfare. I quote it again:

“HMG was reluctant to jeopardise relations with the Australian government...and also to upset philanthropic organisations...Many such organisations enjoyed patronage from persons of influence and position, and it is clear that in some cases the avoidance of embarrassment and reputational risk was more important than the institutions’ responsibilities towards migrated children.”

Lisa Nandy: One of the things that is important to many former child migrants is that this never happens to children again. The story that the hon. Gentleman
The stories we have heard in the debate and over the years have been incredibly moving and heartbreaking. It is inconceivable that over several decades more than 130,000 British children, some as young as three years old, were deported from UK children’s homes and their families without consent, and sometimes even without their parent’s knowledge. That was despite concerns being raised about how those children were being treated not only while abroad but on their journey, including, as we have heard, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. They were also completely dehumanised by having their names and birth dates changed, and even by having any records they had destroyed.

These children did not have regular access to basics such as food, water, shoes and underwear. It is important to remember that they were just children and they had “the injustice they suffered as young children by being sent to a far away land and losing their sense of identity as a result”. Similarly, the IICSA recommends a redress scheme for all surviving former child migrants, with each awarded the same sum in recognition that they were all “exposed to the risk of sexual abuse”.

Because of the age of the surviving migrants—there are 2,000 or so alive today—the IICSA report rightly suggests that the scheme be established urgently, so that payments can be made within 12 months. None of that should interfere with or affect any other forms of ongoing support that are being provided.

This was a truly appalling episode in British history and it will be until we have resolved it. The Government must do what is right by the survivors and other children, and compensation should be paid urgently as per the recommendations of the inquiries.

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing this very important but long-awaited debate, for her excellent speech and for her campaigning on this issue for many years.

I pay special tribute to Dr Margaret Humphreys for bringing this terrible issue into the public domain back in 1987—more than 30 years ago—and for her work and campaigning ever since with the Child Migrants Trust. Having been let down, it has to be said, by successive Governments, her work has changed the lives of so many families for the better. The bonds that families have made, having been reunited, are irreplaceable and she has played a huge part in that. I know that they all thank her deeply.

I also thank the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for taking part in the debate.

I pay tribute to those who have been affected by the child migration programmes and echo the words of the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, who in 2010 said:

“To all those former child migrants and their families...we are truly sorry.”—[Official Report, 24 February 2010; Vol. 506, c. 301.]
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone.

I thank the hon. Member for Wigan (Lisa Nandy) for securing the debate. It is difficult for me to disagree with anything she said. It is four months since the report came out and, dare I say it, we are all a bit distracted by the soap opera that is Brexit, which means that on some of these issues the eye has been taken off the ball. One reason I am grateful to her, therefore, is that this debate helps me to focus some of my colleagues’ minds. She alluded to the fact that this issue affects not just my Department and that we need agreement across Government. I thank her for the opportunity to say where the Department of Health and Social Care is on the issue.

I am pleased to hear that some of the child migrants are watching the debate with interest. I would like to convey to them that we are taking this seriously and will respond to the issues raised in the report. I thank the hon. Lady for showing such interest and passion in speaking on their behalf, because they deserve our support.

I do not think anyone in the Chamber disagrees that the child migration policy was so misguided and harmful and caused such suffering and distress. For us as Members of Parliament in the 21st century, it beggars belief to think that any British Government could think that was a reasonable policy. It clearly caused great suffering and distress to children, who should be protected by institutions of the state. It is crucial that we learn from the mistakes of the past in order to protect and safeguard future generations of children from abuse.

We should never be complacent. We have seen with the likes of Savile how organisations can collude to protect themselves from the worst kinds of allegations, and that continues to this day. Only last week we heard about Gosport, where there was massive collusion on real harm, which causes such distress. All citizens require our support as Members of Parliament to make sure that never happens again.

The hon. Lady told the most harrowing stories, perpetrated by organisations that purport to be Christian, and we heard many examples of cover-ups of abusive behaviour towards children, which I sincerely hope will be further highlighted by the child abuse inquiry. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), who spoke from the Opposition Front Bench, used the term “dehumanising,” which conveys exactly what we are talking about. That is what was done to those children.

We are four months on from the publication of the report, which asked that we take action within a year, so there are eight months to take action. I would like us to give a formal response much sooner—I intend to do so before the summer recess, as everyone has asked. Perhaps in some respects it will be useful to reflect on the points made in this debate for that formal response. All the questions that hon. Members have asked deserve to be answered as part of that, so I thank them for making those points.

Lisa Nandy: I would be grateful if the Minister addressed the two additional requests I made, which former child migrants have also made: for a full apology for the extent of the abuse we now know about; and for the further funding required for the family restoration fund.

Jackie Doyle-Price: We will indeed consider that. As the hon. Lady will be aware—she alluded to this—we are supportive of the family restoration fund and continue to work with the Child Migrants Trust to ensure that we are supporting that work as effectively as possible. Ultimately, we cannot apologise enough for what we have put these people through. We will pick that up as part of the response.

I talked about how institutions collaborated to cover up harm generally. That is why the independent inquiry into child sexual abuse is so crucial, and why we need to look at historical abuse as well as more recent events; otherwise, we will end up turning a blind eye to the same behaviours. As the whole House knows, this is very much an interest of the Prime Minister. She established the inquiry and she wants to shine a light on all such practices so that we can genuinely protect people from sexual abuse in future. Only by getting to the truth and exposing what went wrong in the past can we genuinely learn those lessons. We have now given a voice to victims and survivors. We have given them a chance to tell their stories, which will enable them to start moving on and to draw a line under the suffering that institutions of the state allowed to happen.

As we have heard, the number of children who were migrated is significant: 130,000 in total and 9,000 since the war. As the hon. Lady says, 2,000 of them are still alive today. The intention was well-meaning, but we know that, despite the good intentions, many children suffered terrible emotional, physical and sexual abuse. As she says, although it happened far from our shores, the fault does not lie entirely with overseas Governments. Having established the policy, we owed a duty of care to those people.

As has been mentioned, some children were sent from this country without their parents’ knowledge or consent and without any necessary approval. The obliteration of individual rights in such circumstances is truly abhorrent, and it shocks me that Great Britain, the mother of the free, could behave in this way to any one of its subjects. It is utterly shocking. We know that some parents were even told that their children had died, when in fact their names had just been changed when they were sent abroad. That is totally unthinkable.

It is right that the child migration programme was captured by that inquiry and very important that we looked at it as a matter of urgency, given the age of some of the survivors. All hon. Members will know that the Department of Health collaborated fully with the inquiry, as it did with all other investigations. We responded to all requests for information and gave full access to our files and records, as well as giving comprehensive evidence to the inquiry hearings.

The hon. Lady will also be aware that the inquiry heard harrowing testimonies from former child migrants. She has referred to some of those stories today. Essentially, everyone turned a blind eye to allow the conditions for that abuse to flourish. It is quite right that the inquiry concluded that systematic hardship and abuse did indeed occur as part of the programmes, and that insufficient protection and safeguards meant that they were allowed to continue for far too long.
The physical and emotional damage in childhood has had a lifelong negative impact on many former child migrants. I know that those watching today will agree that some still struggle to overcome their experiences, which continue to blight their lives and those of their families—not to mention the health consequences. I hear the hon. Lady’s message that since the report was published we have lost a further 10 survivors. That underlines the case for our responding to the report as soon as possible, and I give her my undertaking that I will do my level best to get that out as soon as possible.

One thing that we are grappling with within Government is whether there are issues of precedence in how we address the recommendations of the report. In particular, given the breadth of what the inquiry will be looking at, we have to be careful how we pitch it. That discussion is taking place at the highest level among Ministers. The spirit in which we established the inquiry will be ruined if we do not take those discussions seriously. I convey that message to all hon. Members. In her speech, the hon. Lady referred to a letter from solicitors pending legal action. I have seen that correspondence and it is receiving attention, so I can give her that assurance too.

I appreciate that I am not giving the answer that hon. Members would like, because they are all rightly impatient for the response. I hope that they will accept that we are carefully considering the report’s recommendations and are committed to responding as soon as we can, given the advanced age and declining health of the people we are talking about. Frankly, that is the only way to avoid neglecting them further. We should not shy away from our responsibilities now and there should be no dispute about the Departments that are responsible. The Department of Health and Social Care and its predecessor Departments have led the Government on these issues since they were first identified by Margaret Humphreys in the 1980s. I add my voice to those who have paid tribute to her today. She provided the challenge that made us all face up to what went on in our name in the past.

To conclude, the work of the child sex abuse inquiry brings to our attention the need for change in our approach to child sexual abuse. We should never turn a blind eye. We should always listen. We must also approach to child sexual abuse. We should never turn a blind eye.

Finally, I will say some last words to the former child migrants who, despite enduring such a damaging start to their lives, have managed with great courage to overcome their past and to positively shape their future. We owe it to them to learn the lessons of the past, and the inquiry’s work is designed to do that. I do not think that anyone can pay sufficient tribute to their stoicism and courage in moving on and shaping their lives—but they are quite right to remind us how we failed them.

I wish again to thank the hon. Lady for securing the debate, and I thank all hon. Members who have contributed to it. We will note the points that have been made as we develop our response to the child migration report, which I hope to share with everyone in the not-too-distant future.

5.16 pm

Lisa Nandy: I thank all hon. Members who have taken part in the debate, and I thank the Minister for her honesty in how she has approached this, given the serious delays and their impact, which we have discussed. I thank her, too, for her personal assurances on this matter; I believe they are genuine and I am encouraged by that. I hope that others listening to the debate will also be encouraged. I am particularly grateful to her for committing to a formal response before the recess and for considering the additional requests that I made during the debate.

Given the importance of this subject and the fact that it was the British state that caused this harm and continues to cause this harm, I hope that the formal response will also be made as a statement in the House, so that colleagues have the opportunity to question Ministers about it and it is given the prominence by Government that it deserves. When this matter was finally given to the Department of Health to respond to, there was a concern—and it remains—that the fact that the Department was historically responsible for child welfare but is no longer might mean there would be delays and that due expertise would not be brought to bear. I am grateful to the Minister for recognising that this is a cross-party issue that demands attention at the highest levels, from the Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues.

We will not let this go. It was one of the darkest periods in British history, and it affected not just those former child migrants, but their families. They deserve redress; they deserve a full apology; and all of them, whether they are alive today or not, deserve a legacy of ensuring that this never happens to another child.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered child abuse in the child migration programmes.

5.19 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Wednesday 4 July 2018

[Ms Nadine Dorries in the Chair]

Speech, Language and Communication Support for Children

9.30 am

Rebecca Pow (Taunton Deane) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered speech, language and communication support for children.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries, especially given your own interest in communication, reading and writing.

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt, Ms Pow, but I notice that a lot of Members are wearing jackets. There is a temporary air conditioning unit in the room, but I am not sure how effective it will be. If anybody wishes to remove their jacket, they should feel free to do so.

Rebecca Pow: Thank you, Ms Dorries.

The most fundamental life skill for children is the ability to communicate, which has a direct impact on their ability to learn and develop friendships, and on their life chances. There are huge benefits to getting communication—speech and language development—right from birth, not just to the individual but to society and the economy as a whole. However, despite the best efforts of many involved in supporting children and young people, and some tremendous individual projects and programmes, such as the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, which I welcome here today, the communication champion Jean Gross, the Communication Council, the charity I CAN, and many more, including individual teachers and early years staff, awareness of the importance of children and young people’s speech, language and communication among the public and decision makers still seems sadly lacking. That has a serious impact on individuals and society, hence this debate.

Mr Speaker must be commended for his dedicated interest in this area, and for the Bercow report, a seminal piece of work that was carried out 10 years ago. It was an independent review of the state of provision for children with speech, language and communication needs—that is a bit of a mouthful, so I will refer to it as SLCN. Much good work flowed from that excellent report, including the better communication research programme, and the communication champion I mentioned. However, the recent follow-up report, “Bercow: Ten Years On”, which was published in March by the children’s communication charity I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, and launched in style in Speaker’s House with, I am pleased to say, the Minister in attendance, revealed that despite pockets of great achievement, not enough progress has been made, and that it is a Cinderella sector.

I surmise that that may be linked to the fact that the whole area seems to fall between two stools: health and education. Somehow, it fails to be allotted the place it deserves in this country’s national policy. The second report highlights that, as a nation, we are yet to grasp the significance that not fully focusing on the importance of speech, language and communication has on younger generations and therefore on society as a whole. As a result, thousands of children and families suffer needlessly.

Evidence gathered in the report from thousands of contributors concluded that 1.4 million children and young people in the UK have SLCN. That is 10% of children and young people. Of those, 7.6% have developmental language disorder, which is a condition where children have problems understanding and/or using the spoken language and there is no obvious reason, such as a hearing problem or a physical disability, to explain those difficulties. The rest of that 10% have language disorders associated with other conditions, such as autism or a hearing impairment, plus other difficulties, including stammering. I will not address those conditions; this debate will concentrate on the 7.6% with developmental language disorder. Left untreated, it will adversely affect them for the rest of their lives.

I am interested in this area for a raft of reasons. Much of my career has been spent as a journalist and broadcaster, so communication has been a crucial part of my world, and I appreciate how important it is. I also ran a small business. Even as MPs, we are employers, and when we are looking to take someone on, we are often looking for someone who can communicate—someone who is pleasant, amenable, good with words and able to converse and write clearly. Speech, language and communication skills are essential in our world. Most importantly, I am interested in this area as a parent. I have brought up three children with my husband, Charles, who I hope might be listening, so I am aware that parents can make a real contribution to helping their children develop their communication skills.

Jeremy Quin (Horsham) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech on an interesting topic. To pick up on her point about the value of communication in all professions, we should not forget teachers and the ability to train them through voice coaching. Two Essex multi-academy trusts have invested heavily in voice coaching for their teachers, and they have a much enhanced retention rate of 90%. Ensuring that teachers are educated, coached and assisted helps retention, and it provides a powerful example for the children in their care.

Rebecca Pow: I will move on to talk about teachers and their role, including the things they have noticed and how we might help them. It is such an important point. I am particularly interested in those voice coaching projects.

I mentioned the detrimental effect that poor communication skills can have on children. Affected children do less well at school. From the get-go, they make less academic progress in the early years foundation stage than their contemporaries, and when they leave primary school their attainment in reading, writing and mathematics is much lower than those without SLCN. The report states that only 15% of those identified reached the expected standards. Unsurprisingly, those children are also affected at GCSE level; only 20.3% of SLCN children gain a grade 4 or above in English and maths at GCSE, compared with an expected 63.9% of all pupils. The pattern is clear: poor SLCN attainment will directly affect their academic progress.
On top of that, unfortunately, there is a high chance that those children will develop mental health issues. In fact, young people referred to mental health services are three times more likely to have SLCN. There is also a strong correlation between emotional and behavioural disorders and language difficulties.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for her leadership on this subject, and it is great that she has secured the debate. The report’s recommendations on youth justice are really important, and it is clear that speech and language therapists can play a big part in reducing the risk of reoffending. Does she agree that it is important that those services are provided as early as possible to young people in the youth justice system?

Rebecca Pow: I know that the hon. Gentleman is particularly interested in this area. He makes a valid point, which I will move on to, because it all links up.

Everything I have mentioned so far affects children’s life chances. As the hon. Gentleman just said, that is borne out by the fact that 60% of young offenders have unidentified speech, language and communication problems, so the link between the two is stark. Children with poor vocabulary skills are twice as likely to be unemployed in later life. Young offenders are often put on courses, such as anger management and drug rehabilitation, to try to help them, but if they do not have good reading, writing and communication skills, it is difficult for them to take advantage of those courses. I am sure that you will agree, Ms Dorries, that none of those things is desirable in a 21st-century society.

There is even more to these findings, because many of these children come from areas of social disadvantage. There is a very high prevalence of SLCN among vulnerable children, particularly looked-after children. Again, looked-after children are highly represented in the criminal justice system—the 60% figure emerges again. Unsurprisingly, many excluded children are also found to have SLCN, particularly boys—one study found that 100% of excluded boys had some sort of communication or behavioural disorder.

Unsurprisingly, the children of mothers who sadly have mental health issues, that develop just before or after birth, are often found to display SLCN, probably because as babies they did not receive the crucial stimulation they needed, which is so important from the absolute outset. Such children do not develop the essential language skills. Again, that highlights how important it is to pick up mental health issues in mums as early as possible, because they can have a knock-on effect on the babies.

Parenting is really important, so I will talk about that for a moment—it is not a digression, because it is all directly related. This issue affects not only people from disadvantaged areas, but all of us, wherever we come from. It was motherhood that prompted my interest in the importance of early communication. My sister is a speech, language and communication therapist specialising in early years children—I may have to register an interest. She made me aware of how I ought to engage with my babies from the word go. I do not think I had even held a baby before I had my own children, so I was pretty ignorant about children. I am not saying that my children are model success stories, but I have to say that the tips I was given really helped.

They were just simple things. For example, from birth to three months, parents should get very close to their baby, so that it has eye contact and starts to recognise the mouth, and learns that that is where sounds come from. If children are just sat down in front of a television or a laptop, they will not start to realise that. At six months, a baby starts to become very aware of its environment, so parents should start to talk about the things they are looking at. Obviously, they are not speaking at that point, but they are looking, so parents should start naming the object they think their baby is looking at, whether it is a dog, a cat, a mug or a cup. Then, from nine to 12 months, parents can start to expand on that. Their baby might be in a high chair and pointing at a cup, so the parent should say the word, and they should say it many times, because repetition is how our children learn. Many people think that children do not really communicate until they start talking, but of course they are; they are picking up all those vital signals that will help them to start forming words. It is an utterly fascinating subject.

I am told that dummies really are a no-no. Nursery staff I have spoken to have borne that out. If a dummy is put in a child’s mouth too often, it can affect the way the mouth develops. I discussed that only recently with a specialist facial consultant at Musgrove Park Hospital, and she agreed that we do not want to influence what happens in a baby’s mouth, because that has to grow and develop as well.

I will turn now to an area that I know is close to your heart, Ms Dorries: reading stories, poems and even songs. We can never do enough of that with our children, starting from the word go. I recently read an article by the author Philip Pullman, in which he bemoaned the fact that, sadly, not enough children are read to anymore and that the bedtime story is disappearing. Indeed, staff at a nursery in Taunton that I visited recently told me that many parents are ditching the bedtime story. The bedtime story is a crucial way for children to learn how to communicate, and again it is not to do with how wealthy someone is, or how smart they are. It is a cheap activity—almost free—that can help our children so much.

Some very interesting research on teaching effective vocabulary produced by A. Biemiller has shown that at age seven relatively high-performing children have an average of 7,100 words in their repertoire and that they can learn, on average, three words a day. However, relatively poor-performing children have an average of 3,000 words in their repertoire and learn, on average, one word a day. That is an enormous gap to fill if those relatively poor-performing children are to catch up when they get to school—I am told on good authority that it is almost impossible for them to catch up. Vocabulary at age five is the best predictor of a child’s outcomes at GCSE level.

Ruth Smeeth (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing such an important debate. Stoke Speaks Out is one of the national exemplars of how to engage with this issue. Does she agree that we need sustained funding for such programmes? We have seen engagement in this work. In my constituency,
84% of children were 12 months behind in oral skills at the age of two. There was heavy investment and they eventually did well in their GCSEs, but funding was particularly bolstered for the children in the next years and we saw an exact inverse relationship in their long-term attainment. Does she agree that, in order to break the cycle, we need sustained funding for every year?

Rebecca Pow: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention; she makes a good point. I have heard about that extremely good project, and there are others. I know that the matter is on the Minister’s agenda. I think that this is a process of joining up the dots, so that we can make good progress, because it is really coming to light how important this issue is for society as a whole. We cannot expect teachers to do it all. They must be able to pick up where they have to, and rightly so, but there is a lot that parents can do, and we could give them many more pointers when they have children. We must engage society on the whole issue.

To pick up on the hon. Lady’s point, many nurseries and primary schools in Taunton Deane have joined me in supporting the idea that we ought to engage with parents to encourage them to do a little more. For example, staff at Topps Nursery at Musgrove Park Hospital, which I visited last week, are really concerned about the number of children arriving at their door who simply do not have the expected communication skills, whatever their age. Many of those children are not potty-trained, which is a problem, but many also lack basic communication skills. It was the staff at that nursery who mentioned dummies and said, “Please don’t use them.” They also expressed concern about too many children being dumped in front of gadgets, so that they are not stimulated and do not have normal levels of human contact.

I also met a couple of headteachers from two of my really excellent primary schools, St George’s Catholic School and Trull Church of England VA Primary School. When I mentioned that I had secured this debate, both of them said that they had experienced a marked rise in the number of children who do not talk when they start school, who cannot hold a conversation, who do not listen, who have speech problems and who therefore have poor social interaction skills. I was quite taken aback when they so quickly came up with this list of issues that our teachers are clearly facing. Of course, those issues put an added burden on our already hard-working and professional nursery and teaching staff and practitioners.

Fiona Onasanya (Peterborough) (Lab): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. She is eloquently explaining the factors that inhibit our children’s development of communication skills. It is more than 10 years since Mr Speaker produced his first report, so does the hon. Lady agree that it is now time to implement its recommendations? In my constituency there is a lady called Helena, who was diagnosed with selective mutism and social anxiety. It is felt that if she had received the support she needed as a child, she would now, as an adult, be better able to contribute to society. However, she has great difficulty communicating and so is unable to work or go out alone. Does the hon. Lady agree that implementing the report’s recommendations would help such people?
be provided to parents. For example, I am going to put something on my website. How about writing to all parents who have just had babies, offering ideas and suggestions? I am sure that there are some simple things we could do.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham mentioned, there should also be training for practitioners, including health visitors. Health visitors are so often the ones on the frontline who get sent in; it is largely they who spot the really difficult cases and deal with them. I recently spoke to Alison Kalwa, one of the wonderful health visitors in my constituency. She said, “Just give me a few more hours and a bit more time, and I could make so much difference with language development skills with the mum or dad and their baby.”

Having been to the launch of the Bercow report, I raised a lot of these issues in a letter to the Prime Minister, and I was really pleased with the interest she took in her response. She referenced the Department for Education’s plans to work with Public Health England to enable health visitors and early years practitioners to identify children’s SLCN early and put the right support in place. I would very much welcome the Minister saying a little more about that.

Overall, we need an overarching strategy with speech, language and communication at its core, and with a recognition that early identification is key. I very much welcome the recent announcement of an additional £20 billion for the NHS. One of the planks of that is mental health, so perhaps we have an opportunity to engage and harness some of that funding to work on communication needs so that we can prevent people from developing mental health issues in the first place. That is where it would be so important for health providers to link together, with all the public bodies playing their part, including Public Health England, NHS England, the Care Quality Commission, NHS Improvement, Ofsted and the Youth Justice Board, which brings in the point that the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Nick Smith) made about offenders.

How about including children’s SLCN in those sustainability and transformation plans we keep hearing so much about? Of the 44 sustainability and transformation plans published in 2016, only three mention the issue. Surely there must be scope there. Perhaps Ofsted inspectors can be trained to ensure that children’s communication is part of everyday life. What is overridingly apparent to me is that the issue must be approached jointly by the health and social care sector and by the education sector—even in deciding which Minister we might like to answer us. It causes a slight dilemma: should it be the Department for Education or the Department of Health and Social Care? Who would it be better to raise the issue with? I am optimistic that this Minister has great links and communication skills and will hotfoot it to the Department for Education so that they can work jointly. I would love to hear his views on that.

I am optimistic that the Government can work on the issue, and it is brilliant that all these things are coming to light and so much work is being done. While I am at it, I have to put in a bid for something. In Parliament I often focus on issues relating to the environment, nature and the countryside, and one thing I have noticed is that many teachers and nursery practitioners have said how our children adore forest schools and getting outside to commune with nature. That is a great way to stimulate them and get their communication skills going, so let us work some of that into what we do as well. Things should not all be separate. Forest schools are a great way of engaging our children.

To sum up, if communication was given the priority it deserves, the 1 million-plus children in England who are suffering with communication problems could be helped. We should be thinking about the 7.6% whose life chances could be improved. Not addressing the issue will be a cost to society and the economy. If there are things out there that we can do to help, we must try to do them. If the issues are addressed, by engaging some of the excellent recommendations outlined in the second Bercow report, we will have wins for the individuals, for society and for the economy as a whole.

9.58 am

Preet Kaur Gill (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

I start by acknowledging the tremendous support and activism there has been throughout the country to raise the profile of the “Bercow: Ten Years On” report and the need to improve speech, language and communication support for children and young people. That support is essential in improving the lives of the more than 1.4 million children and young people in the UK who have communication difficulties, too many of whom are not getting the support they need.

I welcome the representatives of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists who are here today, and thank it for all the work it has done. I also put on the record my thanks to Gillian Rudd from Birmingham City University in my constituency for her work raising awareness of this matter.

The petition on Parliament’s website regarding the “Bercow: Ten Years On” report has more than 10,500 signatures. That demonstrates the public’s desire to ensure that support for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs is improved, along with the support for their families, carers, teachers and other professionals.

The nationwide figures are stark. More than 10% of children and young people in the UK—some 1.4 million—have some form of persistent, long-term SLCN, and in areas of social disadvantage up to 50% of children can start school with delayed language or other identified SLCN. Across Birmingham, that translates to more than 21,000 children and young people with communication needs, 7.6% of whom will have a developmental language disorder and at least 1% of whom will stammer. Those children and young people would likely benefit from long-term support to enable them to achieve their full potential.

Let us not forget that we are also talking about the need for parents, carers, teachers and other professionals to be supported and equipped with the skills that they need. Those who have difficulty communicating can have problems with understanding and expressing themselves, including in social interactions. Imagine for a moment not being able to make yourself understood, not being able to understand what is being said to you, and not being able to make friends or develop positive relationships; it is a truly frightening thought.
Left unidentified and unsupported, difficulties with speech, language and communication can have a huge impact on children and young people’s life chances across a wide range of areas: educational attainment, behavioural issues, mental health and wellbeing, health inequalities, employment prospects, and interactions with the criminal justice system. “Bercow: Ten Years On” has demonstrated that more needs to be done to ensure better speech, language and communication support for children and young people who have SLCN.

The Minister has written to me outlining some of the things that the Government are doing, including focusing on closing the word gap at age five and working more closely with Public Health England to support health visitors and early years practitioners. That is a good start, but more needs to be done, particularly for the children and young people who need help beyond the age of five. Can the Minister confirm what discussions his Department has had with the Department of Health and Social Care, the Ministry of Justice, and the Youth Justice Board regarding the report? Furthermore, what plans does his Department have to extend the proposals to improve identification and support in respect of SLCN to children over the age of five?

As the Minister knows, I have written to the Prime Minister asking what the Department of Health and Social Care is doing in response to the report, given the need for specialist services. Joint commissioning between education and health, and the impact of communication difficulties on mental health and health inequalities, is absolutely integral.

In separate correspondence, the Minister for Care told me that

“more needs to be done to ensure that children with a stammer are able to access the communications support they need”,

and that

“the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education will be considering what more could be done to strengthen commissioning of communication support.”

That interest from the Department of Health and Social Care is encouraging because, as the Minister knows, many children with SLCN are identified initially by health visitors. As speech and language therapy services are most often commissioned and provided as part of the health system, it is essential that the Department of Health and Social Care plays its full part in responding to the report. Only with cross-Government action can we improve the life chances of all children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.

“Bercow: Ten Years On” makes numerous recommendations to improve speech, language and communication support for children and young people, the most central of which is a cross-governmental strategy for children with speech, language and communication at its core. I wish to place on the record my support for the recommendations in the report. With that in mind, will the Minister commit to introducing a cross-Government strategy for children with speech, language and communication at its core? When will the Government formally respond to the “Bercow: Ten Years On” report? The Prime Minister committed to responding at Prime Minister’s questions on 21 March.

Finally, I thank the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) for securing this very important debate and, of course, the Speaker of the House, the right hon. Member for Buckingham (John Bercow), for his leadership in this area. We all recognise how important communication is to our children, and I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues to ensure that we all play our part in helping to improve the life chances of all children and young people with speech, language and communication needs. If we do not, it is clear that we will be failing the next generation of children and young people.

10.4 am

David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) on securing this important debate on a very important topic. As soon as I became aware of the topic, it reminded me that the subject of speech, language and communication needs—she is right that it is a bit of a mouthful, so I will refer to it as SLCN—is a key factor in supporting patients of a condition that has come to be very close to my heart.

I chair the all-party group on a condition called 22q11.2 deletion syndrome—again, a bit of a mouthful—which is sometimes known as DiGeorge syndrome. For the purposes of this speech, I will refer to the condition by the abbreviation 22q. The genetic condition is not so rare, but it is often misdiagnosed or undiagnosed, and is estimated to affect anything from 1 in 4,000 to 1 in 1,000 births. It is the second most common chromosomal disorder after Down’s syndrome and is often described as “the most common genetic disorder you’ve never heard of”.

In the APPG meeting that I chaired last week, we were fortunate to be joined by clinical experts on the condition from Great Ormond Street, including Dr Debbie Sell, the principal speech and language therapist who specialises in speech disorders associated with cleft lip and palate, which is very common in 22q, along with developmental issues.

As a condition, 22q exemplifies the problems of SLCN. Indeed, speech and language disorders are a hallmark of 22q. Furthermore, given the very high incidence of mental health difficulties in people with 22q, irrespective of communication issues, combining the existing risk with the common existence of SLCN makes the group hugely vulnerable. Maximising their speech and language potential is especially important to their ability to benefit from non-pharmacological mental health interventions. Children with 22q frequently have developmental challenges, with language and speech disorders. Their understanding is often relatively intact, but words and sentences do not come at the expected age.

For example, three to four-year-olds might have only a handful of words and simple phrases. As pre-schoolers, they might need to be taught a gesture or signing system as an alternative means of communication until their verbal language starts to develop. During this period, therapy is essential in addressing attention and listening skills; developing the basic early communication skills of taking turns and making eye contact, much as my hon. Friend described helping parents interpret their child’s non-verbal communication cues and oral attempts; and supporting parents in learning and implementing a gesture system.

Once sounds and simple words start to emerge, therapy changes to developing vocabulary and sentence structure. Speech is often severely unintelligible, with atypical
consonant production often associated with a problem with the soft palate or the back of the throat. Some 75% of cases need surgery from cleft lip and palate teams. Surgery to correct the problem is less likely to be successful than the same surgery in children without 22q, and often more than one surgery is required. Although surgery will improve the anatomy in order to speak clearly, speech therapy is still required to eliminate consonant errors. That is not an overnight or easy task and often requires intervention over at least two to three years and often more. Therapists need expert advice on how to correct the abnormal articulatory patterns from the cleft team’s speech and language therapist, collaborating with the community-based SLT.

Unfortunately, we know that access to intervention is often woefully inadequate and becoming more difficult. In 2017, a report on behalf of the clinical reference group for cleft lip and palate for NHS England showed unacceptable inequalities in SLT provision and outcomes across the UK, with large differences in the timing, intensity, regularity and quality of therapy for each child. The “Bercow: Ten Years On” report, which I will refer to later, concluded that therapy provision is a “postcode lottery”, based not on evidence but on costs and demand.

Children do respond to intervention and they can do well in the resolution of their early speech and language difficulties if they can access help. However, persistent expressive language difficulties and impaired abstract language are common in the school years. They struggle particularly when the school curriculum starts to become more abstract. Their language skills, involving humour, inferencing and sarcasm can drop off, and their academic skills can drop off too. My constituents who have children who suffer from a range of conditions often find that their frustration increases when their children move from one school year to another, and new teachers have to learn about the condition.

Accessing language therapy at school age is very difficult, and even worse in senior-school settings. The children start to fail educationally just at the time when their mental health issues can kick in. In the 13 months since I was elected to this place, I have had several constituents come to me who are affected by even rarer conditions than 22q, including genetic disorders such as Edwards syndrome, CHARGE syndrome—coloboma, heart defects, atresia choanae, growth retardation, genital abnormalities and ear abnormalities syndrome—and others. In those cases, I, along with the families affected, have been disappointed that clinicians sometimes view those rare cases as the statistical rarity that they represent, rather than treating the person as an individual patient in their own right.

The “Bercow: Ten Years On” report, which has been mentioned, states:

“Poor understanding of and insufficient resourcing for SLCN mean too many children and young people receive inadequate, ineffective and inequitable support, impacting on their educational outcomes, their employability and their mental health”.

as well as leading to an over-representation in the justice system. I, too, support the report’s recommendations, which are highly relevant to children and young people with 22q. It is critical that the Department of Health and Social Care plays its part in taking those recommendations forward.

10.11 am

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries, and thank you for letting me indicate my wish to speak at such a late stage. I congratulate the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) on securing this important debate, and on the tenacity with which she has pursued this issue pretty much every time I have been in the Chamber for questions and she has been able to raise it. The perspicacity of her speech demonstrates that she clearly has this issue in her heart; it is not something that she is doing simply because she can.

I want to touch on the Stoke Speaks Out scheme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) mentioned. It is a wonderful scheme, which Janet Cooper and her team have run for a number of years. The purpose of the scheme is to identify at a very early age young people in Stoke-on-Trent for whom speech and language could be a barrier to their overall development, aspiration and further opportunity.

The team at Stoke Speaks Out do wonderful work, but they have the never-ending problem of constantly having to reinvent the service that they are trying to deliver in order to qualify for new rounds of funding from various different funding agencies and bodies. The reality is that they have a model that works. It has been statistically proven to work, and they have a quantified dataset that shows that their interventions cause improvements. In fact, the baseline-in-readiness in Stoke-on-Trent schools in 2016 showed that only 35% of our young people were ahead or on track for speech standards, but after intervention by the Stoke Speaks Out team that figure had risen to 54% by July 2017. I think we would all agree that that is a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time for an organisation that was operating on a shoestring.

This is not an issue with our schools. The schools in our city are rated good or outstanding overall. This is a community issue and a societal issue, and it is a problem that is often missed. The most pertinent point that the hon. Member for Taunton Deane made was about early intervention outside school years. We have a disproportionate number of young people in Stoke-on-Trent for whom the 30 hours of nursery provision or pre-school arrangements simply are not available, because of work arrangements or the hours threshold. That means that a lot of young people go directly from a home situation into a reception class. Headteachers around the constituency consistently tell me that young people benefit from provision in a nursery school setting, and that there is a marked and quantifiable difference in readiness for speech and language skills between children who come into school aged four and those who have been through nursery provision aged three.

The simple fact is that early intervention teams within the community health team cannot pick up every case where somebody may have an issue with speech and learning development. Stark statistics suggest that around half the young people in the constituencies of Stoke-on-Trent North, Stoke-on-Trent South and Stoke-on-Trent Central have up to a 12-month delay in their language skills by the age of three. As the hon. Member for Taunton Deane pointed out, that is a huge impediment to their future success.
Schools also talk to me quite readily about the fact that they struggle to get some parents to engage with at-home reading. That is sometimes down to parents not making the effort—we must be honest about that—but it is also because adult literacy rates in some parts of my constituency mean that parents do not have the confidence to sit down and read with their children from a very young age. Again, that can cause issues around how people parent. The hon. Member for Taunton Deane rightly pointed out that the “digital corner parent”, as we call it in our house, sometimes has a much greater presence in the young person’s life than it should, to the extent that a headteacher in one of my schools said that one of their problems was children coming in with American accents, because they watch American cartoons and TV, and that has become dominant. In some of my local schools, the words “soda” and “elevator” are now more commonly used than “pop” and “lift”, because that is the way that some parents arrange things.

Ruth Smeeth: I hate to interrupt a narrative about American television, but one of the most important things that Stoke Speaks Out has done is to deliver 3,000 free books to children across our city as part of the Stoke Reads project. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is as vital for parents as it is for children, as those parents start reading to their children?

Gareth Snell: Once again, the hon. Lady is absolutely right. The headteachers I have spoken to in Stoke-on-Trent say that once they can get parents, who may have had quite an unpleasant time at school themselves, into the school and show them that it is a safe environment for them as well as their children, the engagement levels with those parents increase. Suddenly, the child’s homework gets better, the reading diary is filled in, there is more interaction with the school for pastoral and social events, and the family becomes a much more engaged part of the school community rather than simply dropping their children off and picking them up in the afternoon.

I would be grateful if the Minister explained what the Government can do on early intervention, because it looks as if many of the future funding promises will be geared towards schools, which are already overstretched. If we can reach young people before school, we can close the gap and ensure that their opportunities for learning are increased.

I would also be grateful if the Minister, if he is unable to answer today, could at least think about longer-term aspirational plans. Stoke-on-Trent is an opportunity area, with two wonderful co-chairs, Professor Liz Barnes and Carol Shanahan, leading the way. They know that early intervention and breaking the cycle early on is important. Will the Minister tell us how he sees that programme being funded sustainably? The opportunity area is a three-year programme and they will do what they can in their three years, but that period will run out. How can we embed that work into our culture and society?

The schools in my constituency are working absolutely flat out to address this issue. I know that this is not a debate about fairer funding arrangements, but is there anything that the Minister could do to consider schools in areas such as Stoke-on-Trent, where deprivation levels are higher than we would like them to be on every metric? Might there be longer term intervention programmes for our city? We need to make sure that the generation of MPs who follow me and my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North are not also discussing this issue.

10.20 am

Marion Fellows (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I congratulate the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) on securing the debate. She gave a wonderful, learned speech and talked of her own experiences. I found it really interesting.

Everyone who has spoken agrees that it is important that speech and language is set early on, and hon. Members have spoken of the different ways in which we can do that and how much it affects children’s life chances. That is also really important for the economy. I also give credit to the Bercow report and the follow-up report.

The hon. Member for Taunton Deane talked about how many young offenders have speech and language difficulties, and that is an important point. I enjoyed work with adults on adult literacy. A lot of adults are scared to admit that they cannot read, but it is a really gentle, lovely way of engaging adults, because of course they cannot help their children if they cannot read properly themselves. The hon. Gentleman made a very good point about that.
how the hon. Lady spoke about teaching our children to speak. I have three children and three granddaughters, and I have always talked to my children. Sometimes now I notice that some of my grandchildren and some of my friends’ grandchildren—I am not pointing any fingers—are, as the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) said, growing up with an American accent. In some cases in Scotland, they are growing up with an English accent because they listen to English TV programmes made in England. Really, children should be speaking their own language—it makes it much easier for them all round.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) highlighted the problems across England and congratulated the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists on its work. I am glad to see so many members of the Royal College here today.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) is chair of the all-party parliamentary group on 22q11 syndrome. I have had dealings with a constituent who left Banff and Buchan and moved to Motherwell and Wishaw, who has spoken to me at great length about that issue. I will help her, but am unable to help as much as I would like, because that is a devolved issue in Scotland. I have signposted her to the local Member of the Scottish Parliament so that she can get the help she needs. Some of the stories she told me are heart-rending—the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan exemplified that point.

Language is such an important foundation for the whole education process. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central mentioned that 50% of under-threes in his area have up to a 12-month delay in language skills. The UK cannot afford those delays, which affect the life of the children and which, as we have heard, can lead to offending. That must be addressed. The hon. Gentleman talked about the importance of early intervention, which is a keystone of Scottish Government policy. If, as the First Minister hopes, we are to close the educational attainment gap, it is before children go to school that a lot of work needs to be done to help them.

The Scottish Government believe that it is vital that speech and language communication support for children is evidence-based and responds to the needs of the child. The “Getting it right for every child” plan is Scotland-wide and is at the heart of early intervention.

People talk about the crossover between health and education. Great progress has been made on that in Scotland. NHS Education for Scotland has recently announced a new educational resource to help to meet speech, language and communication needs. It is an interactive, portable tool that people such as health visitors can take into family homes to pick up on language difficulties early on. It helps them to signpost parents to where they can get more help and support for their children, in order to prevent the gap and language delay before children start school or nursery.

There are many free book schemes in Scotland for young children at nursery age and in primary 1. Sometimes, if a child brings home a book, the parent is more likely to be pestered into reading to the child. That is also something that the Minister might look at. There has also been some co-operation with Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library, which also gives out free books. It is vital that children are read to and learn to read as quickly as possible so that their whole education has a much more sound basis.

In 2016, the Scottish Government held a communications summit jointly with the RCSLT, and work is ongoing. They have called for an action plan to support the changing and growth of speech, language and communication assets and have asked for key stakeholder support.

The Bookbug club runs in my constituency, as it does in many Scottish libraries. I do not know whether they run in England, but in Scotland, almost all local libraries run Bookbug sessions, to which parents with children as young as three months can go along. They work on language and singing. I attended one in Perth with my granddaughter and it was great fun. At one time, I wondered what the benefit was so early on—she was six months old when I took her—but it is of great benefit and supports the point about children picking up early on language.

I have a wonderful resource in the Wishaw part of my Motherwell and Wishaw constituency at Orchard Primary School. It has a language unit for children with a wide range of language difficulties. Some children need to be taught in the unit, but many go into the mainstream primary school. I have had great reports from constituents whose children are autistic or somewhere on the spectrum, who have been able to go on to a mainstream secondary school because their language skills have been so much improved by the unit.

The Scottish Government are still working with the Royal College, which is helping them to go over the submissions that have been made, to get the action plan up and running across Scotland to aid the development of our young children. The working group is looking forward to producing that action plan.

I ask the Minister to look at what the Scottish Government are doing and use that as part of the evidence. In Scotland, we sometimes do things differently—not always better, but differently—in a number of areas. Since I came to this place, I have noticed that there is sometimes a reluctance to look close to home, at what is being done north of the border, to see where it might help improve the situation. We are not exclusive. We want to help everybody, and we might help children in England as well, so I encourage the Minister to look at that. It is vital that our children acquire these skills, and I am happy to speak to him about anything he wishes to know. From my service on the Education Committee, I know that such discussion does not always happen. This is about children’s life chances and giving them the best possible start in life so that the whole economy can benefit. Children can benefit, and their families will too—everyone will benefits if we can put that into practice.

10.30 am

Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck (South Shields) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I thank the hon. Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) for securing today’s debate, 10 years on from the Bercow report, on this important topic. I pay tribute to Mr Speaker, I CAN and the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists for their groundbreaking work in this area, and to all hon. Members who have spoken today.

Many of us take communication for granted, but imagine being unable to express how you feel, what you think and what you need. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) described...
that scenario eloquently. The effects can be debilitating and can last throughout childhood and adolescence and well into adulthood if someone is left unsupported. I know myself how, threating that can be. Growing up with dyspraxia—being different and standing out—caused me to have chronic low self-esteem and to isolate mysel from my peers. Of course, I did all right in the end—I ended up in this place—but that is because I got lucky and have had the benefit of being surrounded, then and now, by some phenomenal people. For the 1.4 million children who struggle with speech, language and communication needs, it is vital that the right support is there when they need it, but it is often lacking. Our children are being let down to the degree that, at present, six children in every classroom do not meet the expected levels of communication and language skills at age five.

Children with speech, language and communication difficulties can access speech therapy and support via a number of avenues, including their health visitor, GP or school, but the Government have presided over a decline of more than 2,000 health visitors in the past two years. Fewer GPs are in place than in 2015, and our schools are now down to half the number funding cuts in 20 years—more than £2 billion is being cut from their budgets. It is little wonder, then, that the “Bercow: Ten Years On” report highlighted that 73% of parents and carers found it difficult to get help with their child’s speech, language and communication needs, and 52% thought their family’s experience of speech, language and communication support was poor.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell) said, the original Bercow report called for early intervention that prioritises speech, language and communication therapy in Sure Start children’s centres, 500 of which the Government have closed. The report called for the workforce to be strengthened, but senior and specialist language posts are being lost due to a restructuring of NHS speech and language therapy services. It called for the primary and secondary curriculum to emphasise speech and language communication. Instead, speaking and listening has been removed from the national curriculum, the Julia Donaldson early years framework has been removed from the Ofsted framework and there is no assessment of spoken language in the curriculum after the age of five. Some 49% of early years practitioners receive little or no initial training in typical speech, language and communication development.

The Communication Trust—a large consortium of speech and language and communications skills charities—saw demand for its services increase by 33% last year, but in March this year the Department for Education told us that its contract would be ending. The tender to replace it has no mention at all of speech, language and communication. The “Bercow: Ten Years On” report highlighted that only 15% of survey respondents said speech and language therapy was available as required in their local area. It is little wonder that, last year, only 234,076 children with speech, language and communication needs actually received any support.

The pattern of Government neglect is more apparent when children have needs in addition to speech and language difficulties, or get support via education and healthcare plans. The hash the Government have made—more of those plans is well documented. They were supposed to encourage joined-up planning between healthcare professionals and schools, but in reality that is not happening. It is often said that health is missing from the plans. At least 65,000 children were not moved on to the new plans by the Government’s deadline of March this year. A damning report by the head of the care and social care ombudsman, which looked at a large sample of plans, found many flaws in their execution.

A report by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists noted that children without plans are being left completely without support. Just 40% of respondents said that they have the capacity to deliver services to children without a plan, and 43% said that speech and language therapy is not being commissioned for the crucial age group of nought to two, or for people aged 18 to 25 who are preparing for work or further education.

The Bercow report revealed that more than half of parents and carers had to wait longer than six months for their child to get the help they needed. Six months is a long time in a child’s developmental cycle. My six-year-old constituent, Penny Whyte, has a speech disorder and has been receiving blocks of speech therapy since the age of three, but she has to wait an average of nine months between blocks. She was also referred to intensive therapy, but has had to wait three years for a place. Imagine being Penny’s mam, Donna, who knows that her little girl is just as bright and capable—perhaps more so—than everyone else, but she is falling behind her peers. Her true potential is masked because the support she needs is being withheld by a fragmented system that cares more about marketisation and the profit that can be gleaned from health and education services than about their delivery.

The Government talk a good game when it comes to social mobility, but the reality is different. In areas of social disadvantage, 50% of children start school with delayed language and communication skills. Children eligible for free school meals are 2.3 times more likely than their peers to have language difficulties. Only 51% of those pupils achieve a good level of development at the end of their early years foundation stage, compared with 69% of their peers. Children with special educational needs or disability remain stubbornly over-represented in alternative provision and exclusion figures. Three quarters of pupils in pupil referral units have special educational needs. Last year alone, more than 4,000 were left without a school place. Some are subject to informal exclusions, and some are being home-schooled. The fact is that the Government have not bothered to keep track of those children, so we do not know where they are and what support, if any, they are getting.

I want to give a shout out, if you will permit me, Ms Dorries, to some of the non-verbal children I worked with in the past, who are now adults. They taught me the power of communication, which is so much more than words. It can be a smile, a sparkle in the eye, a nod of the head, a hand movement, a laugh or a cry. What they all had in common is that, once they had the right support, they all made huge progress. One boy I remember in particular transformed from being stoic and withdrawn into being a massive chatterbox—the life and soul of his classroom. That is the power of consistent and sustained speech and language therapy. That power is in the gift of the Minister and the Government.

The Prime Minister said months ago that she would respond formally to the report. She has not done so. The Minister said a few weeks ago in Education questions
that he was looking closely at the recommendations. I have not asked the Minister any questions today, because I simply want him to respond to my comments, those of my hon. Friends, and the report’s findings and recommendations. The children struggling to get by, my constituent Penny Whyte and my younger self at least deserve that.

10.38 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

The hon. Member for South Shields (Mrs Lewell-Buck) started well by asking us to imagine what it would feel like to be unable to communicate or explain one’s own feelings, and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill) said the same thing. I do not need to imagine that, because I was that child. I came to this country with my parents as immigrants in 1978 at the age of 11, and I could not speak English. I sat at the back of the class. Initially, my teachers thought I had learning difficulties, but within six months I had picked up the language. I guess I am the embodiment of what speech, language and communication skills can do for a young child immigrant in this country who cannot speak the language properly.

I feel, however, that the hon. Member for South Shields let herself down by politicking this debate—we have had a good debate today—and attempting to weaponise it, whereas the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), and his colleague the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) in an intervention, spoke eloquently about the work being done by Stoke Speaks Out and in the opportunity area. I must say to both hon. Members that the opportunity areas are the best infrastructure I have seen, of any Government intervention, and have a real chance of working for those disadvantaged communities because they are bottom-up, with real, measurable targets and outcomes. My ambition is to ensure that we meet those targets over three years so that I can make the argument that we should keep supporting opportunity areas.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Rebecca Pow) on securing this important debate, and I am grateful for this opportunity to set out the Government’s position on supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, including those with speech, language and communication needs. I am determined to see children and young people with SLCN receive the support they need to achieve in school and in independent life.

I was pleased to be able to speak at the launch of “Bercow: Ten Years On”, and I am grateful for the work that the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, I CAN and, of course, Mr Speaker himself have done. It was a good coming together of all the specialists, and I put it on the record that the Government will respond formally to the report in due course. I have recently accepted an invitation from the all-party parliamentary group on speech and language difficulties to discuss how we can work together to best support children and young people with SLCN. I hope hon. Members here, and others, will join me in attending the seminar.

Our latest figures show that SLCN is the second commonest need for pupils with an educational health and care plan, with 14.3% of pupils having that need. It is also the second commonest need for those with special educational needs support, at 22%. I know that the “Bercow: Ten Years On” review reports that there is a poor understanding of SLCN and insufficient resourcing for the sector, and many colleagues have talked about that. Of course, that is neither my nor the Government’s expectation. I expect children and young people with SLCN to receive the support they need to help them fulfil their aspirations alongside their peers, and we are taking action to make that a reality.

A lot of progress has been made over the 10 years since the original Bercow review was carried out. The Government have introduced, through the Children and Families Act 2014, the biggest change to the system in a generation. The reforms are about improving the support that is available to all children and young people with SEND. We are doing that by joining up services for ages nought to 25 across education, health and social care, and by focusing on positive outcomes in education, employment, housing, health and community participation. The move to a more child-centred, multi-agency and participative education, health and care needs assessment is improving the support that is available to children and young people with SEND, including those with SLCN.

As of 31 March, over 236,000 children and young people had had their statement of SEN converted to an EHC plan, which equates to 98.4%. That is great news, but we know there is much more to do. The completion of the statutory transition period to the new system is a great achievement, but it is not the end point for the reforms. We are only part of the way to achieving our vision. The biggest issue we now have to address is changing the culture in local government, clinical commissioning groups and education settings.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Will the Minister give way?

Nadhim Zahawi: I am short of time and I have a lot to say about this subject, so the hon. Lady will forgive me if I do not.

Supporting schools to respond to the needs of all their pupils is crucial to achieving our ultimate goal of culture change. We know that spoken language underpins the development of reading and writing, and that the quality and variety of language that pupils hear and speak is vital for developing their vocabulary, grammar, reading and writing. The national curriculum for English, which colleagues mentioned in their comments, reflects the importance of spoken language in pupils’ development across the whole curriculum. At primary level, children should be taught to ask relevant questions, to articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions, to participate in collaborative conversation, to use spoken language to develop understanding and to speak audibly and fluently, with an increasing command of English. Teachers should ensure the continual development of pupils’ confidence and competence in spoken language and listening skills.

Having developed those resources and many others relating to other specific impairments, we are now taking a more strategic approach to better supporting the educational workforce and equipping them to deliver high-quality teaching across all types of SEN. We have
recently contracted with the Whole School SEND Consortium to enable schools to identify and meet their SEND training needs, and I am delighted that the Communication Trust is part of that consortium.

Through that work, the Whole School SEND Consortium will create regional hubs across the country to bring together local SEND practitioners. The hubs will work to encourage schools to prioritise SEND within their continuous professional development and school improvement plans. The resources provide leaders, teachers and practitioners with access to information about evidence-based practice that can be effective for SEN support, including for those with SLCN.

In terms of joint work and joint commissioning at local authority level, the duty to commission services jointly is vital to the success of the SEND reforms. We recognise that unless education, health and social care partners work together, we will not see that holistic approach to a child’s progression or the positive outcomes that the system aims to achieve. Joint working is one of the best ways of managing pressures on local authority and NHS budgets. Looking for more efficient ways to work together, to share information and to avoid duplication will work in favour of professionals and families.

Some areas are demonstrating excellent joint working. Wiltshire is an example, with positive feedback on the effectiveness of its local joint commissioning arrangements. It was reported that senior officers across education, health and care worked together effectively, adopting a well-integrated and multi-agency approach to plan and deliver services to children and young people with SEND.

We want to learn from those examples. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central mentioned the evidence gathered through Stoke Speaks Out. It troubles me that that particular group of people have to keep reinventing and going back for different pots of money, rather than our looking at that evidence and beginning to scale it for the rest of the country.

Ruth Smeeth: One of the challenges with Stoke Speaks Out is that when it started in 2006 it had 30 staff, but in 2015 it went down to half a member of staff. Now it has gone back up to nearly 10, but its funding is being cut again. That inconsistency is not delivering for the children of Stoke-on-Trent.

Nadhim Zahawi: I hear the hon. Lady’s point; I know she is a great champion of the project, and I pledge to her that I will look at this evidence and see what more we can do to ensure that there are consistent outcomes.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central talked about early years education. It is fundamental that we identify SLCN as early as possible, as we know that can have a profound impact later in life. Children who struggle with language at age five are six times less likely to reach the expected level in English at age 11 than children who have good language skills at age five, and 11 times less likely to achieve the expected level in maths. By age three, disadvantaged children are, on average, already almost a full year and a half behind their more affluent peers in their early language development. That is also why, from a social mobility perspective, the case for addressing SLCN in the early years is so important.

In our social mobility action plan, “Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential”, we announced our ambition to close the word gap in the early years between disadvantaged children and their peers.

MRS LEEWELL-BUCK: Will the Minister give way?

Nadhim Zahawi: I will make some progress and then, as I think we might be all right on time, I will give way.

We have announced a range of measures worth more than £100 million to address word gap, including £20 million for school-led professional development for early years practitioners to support early language development, and a £5 million “what works” fund in partnership with the Education Endowment Foundation. The evidence is clear that parents have a crucial role in this area. The “Study of Early Education and Development” report showed that, aside from maternal education, the home learning environment is the single biggest influence on a child’s vocabulary at age three. We will therefore invest £5 million to trial evidence-based home learning environment programmes in the north of England.

On 1 July, we launched a £6.5 million fund and invited voluntary and community sector organisations to bid for grants to run projects that help disadvantaged families and children with additional needs, and improve children’s early language and literacy skills. Local authorities sit at the centre of a wide range of services and workforces that make a big difference to SLCN. We will work with local authorities through a peer support and challenge programme to deliver better early language outcomes for disadvantaged children, learning from the best evidence so that we can scale it. We will also publish an early years dashboard showing local authorities’ performance in early years outcomes, with a focus on disadvantaged children and early language and literacy.

We recognise the important links between a child’s early health and development and their later education outcomes. That is why we have formed a partnership with Public Health England, which my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane mentioned, and the Department of Health and Social Care to improve early language outcomes for disadvantaged children. In May, Public Health England launched a call for good local practice and pathway examples. At a workshop in London today, it will set out the key components of a model speech, language and communication needs pathway built on the best evidence and experience of implementation in practice. Those resources will provide health visitors with additional tools and training to identify and support children’s SLCN, and ensure that the right support is put in place early.

Let me turn to the mental health Green Paper. Mental health was another key feature of the “Bercow: Ten Years On” report, which highlighted the links between SLCN and mental health issues and made a number of recommendations about how the proposals in the Green Paper link with SLCN provision. The Government published the Green Paper, “Transforming Children and Young People’s Mental Health Provision”, on 4 December last year. The consultation closed on 2 March and we are currently considering responses. We will issue a formal response in due course.

The Green Paper creates clear expectations about the changes every area should seek in order to improve activity on prevention, partnership working between
children and young people's mental health services and schools, and access to specialist support. As part of that, we are incentivising every school and college to train a designated senior lead for mental health to co-ordinate a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. We expect the designated senior lead to liaise with speech and language therapists to ensure that children with SLCN receive the help they need.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: I thank the Minister for eventually giving way. He said that I had let myself down by making this issue political. I respectfully say that he is letting me and other hon. Members down. I listed a litany of failures by this Government towards children with speech, language and communication needs, and not once—

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order. Mrs Lewell-Buck, please make an intervention, not a speech.

Mrs Lewell-Buck: Sorry. Not once has the Minister responded with anything practical. All he says is, “In the future we will”. What about now? This is urgent.

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): I call the Minister. Please remember to leave a minute for Ms Pow to wind up the debate.

Nadhim Zahawi: Of course, Ms Dorries.

The Department of Health and Social Care recognises the need to support children and young people with SLCN who are in the justice system. Liaison and diversion services at police stations and courts identify and assess people with vulnerabilities and refer them to the appropriate services—where appropriate, away from the justice system altogether.

A comprehensive health assessment tool care plan is undertaken for all children, setting out their needs and the provision of health services. All sites have access to the full range of comprehensive child and adolescent mental health provision for children with mental health or neuro-disability needs, including child psychiatrists and psychologists, specialist nurses, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

Let me address the point that was made by the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Marion Fellows) about the devolved Scottish Government. I am more than happy to come up and learn what the Scottish Government are undertaking, and to share good practice from England.

My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) mentioned the niche chromosomal deficiency 22q11.2. I am happy to discuss that with him to understand it a little better. I already work closely with my colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care to raise the issue of practitioners treating people as statistical outliers, rather than as real children with real families, and I will take what he said on board.

I am grateful for the support right hon. and hon. Members have given this agenda. My hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane raised important concerns and I hope that she is happy with my update. The steps the Government have taken show the importance of SLCN, and I hope I have demonstrated that we remain firmly committed and have a real strategy, real funding and real commitment to ensure that children and young people with SLCN receive the support they need.

10.56 am

Rebecca Pow: I thank the Minister, in particular for sharing his experience—I had no idea that he could not speak English until he was 11; it is remarkable how far one can go—and for his clear passion. I hope that stands us in good stead to answer some of the questions that have been raised. I hope that we can work together.

I thank all Members who partook in the debate: my hon. Friends the Members for Banff and Buchan (David Duguid) and for Horsham (Jeremy Quin), and the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Gareth Snell), for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth)—Stoke had a good showing—and for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Preet Kaur Gill). There is clearly great interest in this area, and I hope that the debate has highlighted that there are far too many children with speech, language and communication disorders, which affect their life chances.

Too many children end up having mental health issues, being excluded from school and being young offenders—and ultimately, many end up unemployed. That is not good enough, and we ought to be able to address it. The debate, the Bercow report and, indeed, many of the excellent people watching the debate demonstrate that things do not have to be like this.

As the Minister outlined, a great deal of excellent work is in progress, and there is much more in the pipeline. I get the feeling from speaking to him and from what he said today that he is committed to improving the situation, and there are some simple steps that could improve it. I was pleased to hear that there will be a particular concentration on joint working and joint commissioning of services between health and education, which was one of the things I wanted to ensure came out of the debate.

The continuity of programmes and good projects is also important. I know—especially from my sister’s input—about the awful drama and time-wasting that is involved in having to keep reapplying for funding when people already have a good thing going. That wastes time and everybody’s effort. Perhaps we could try to smooth that out a little.

I am pleased that the all-important issue of parenting was raised. I touched on that because it is not only about very disadvantaged people; it is about everybody. If we engaged a little more on that front, we could make huge progress together. I am optimistic that, with the commitment of the Minister and his Department and of the Department of Health and Social Care, we can make a change.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered speech, language and communication support for children.

Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Will Members please leave the Chamber quietly? The next debate is about to start.
Management of NHS Property

11 am

Karin Smyth (Bristol South) (Lab): I beg to move.

That this House has considered the management of NHS property.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. [Interjection.]

Ms Nadine Dorries (in the Chair): Order, Mr Zahawi, the debate has started.

Karin Smyth: I recognise that the management of NHS property is not the most enthralling subject, but many hon. Members from across the country will recognise that it is a growing problem in their constituencies. The problems are varied and many. My focus today will be on the community and primary care estate.

I will not talk about bricks and mortar or leaking pipes, or outline the detailed and manifold operational challenges posed by an NHS estate that in many parts of the country still relies on pre-1948 infrastructure. Instead, I want to talk about the places our constituents go to when they need care, where they welcome their families, and where they experience the most difficult moments of their lives. These are places where the most vulnerable go to when they need care, where they welcome their families, and where they experience the most difficult moments of their lives. These are places where the most vulnerable

Who owns them? Who runs them? How do they operate? How can users or stakeholders such as MPs say in how they are run or in their future.

Who owns them? Who runs them? How do they operate? How can users or stakeholders such as MPs say in how they are run or in their future. Many of us are trying to make sense of it.

The estate was an afterthought for the coalition Government and their disastrous Health and Social Care Act 2012—the Lansley Act. Their laissez-faire approach, which bordered on contempt, has saddled communities across the country with burdens and consequences ever since. The current Government recognised that in their response to the Naylor review, stating:

“The structural changes in recent years have distracted attention away from the importance of the estate as an enabler of high quality care, and the NHS has lost valuable expertise and knowledge in strategic estates planning, development and management.”

As we are developing the 10-year plan to transform our NHS into a more community-based, joined-up system, the function of the community and primary care estate as an enabler of service transformation becomes more critical. Although the Government said in response to Naylor that they want to incentivise local action, in practice there are no mechanisms to do so. My focus is therefore on the local roles of two national bodies: NHS Property Services and Community Health Partnerships.

The Lansley Act nationalised health centres, GP premises and, in my constituency, the South Bristol Community Hospital overnight. When the Government realised that no one was responsible for property managed by primary care trusts—mainly GP premises and health centres in poorer areas—they set up NHS Property Services, which became the landlord and asset manager on behalf of the Secretary of State. Community Health Partnerships took over the primary care trusts’ 20% control of local infrastructure finance trusts—LIFT companies—which were public-private partnerships for new GP premises and community-based services, such as South Bristol Community Hospital.

A key part of the LIFT incentive was that the companies made a profit and from that a dividend was returned to all shareholders, including the primary care trust. The Lansley Act passed that 20% local share to the Secretary of State. That LIFT company is still operating, as others are across the country. Bristol InfraCare LIFT paid dividends totalling £823,000 last year and £2,344,000 in 2016. Community Health Partnerships received 40% of that, but 20% should have been retained in the Bristol health economy. In the last two years, that amounts to £633,400 in Bristol alone, and that is replicated across the country. I am here today with a simple message for the Secretary of State, via the Minister: I want control of this asset to be given back to the local health economy, and I want our money back.

The closer one looks at the labyrinthine structures that govern NHS properties, the more it seems that the opaque and impenetrable way in which these companies operate is not accidental. They appear to be purposefully disenfranchising and disempowering local people. Whatever
the merits of the Lansley Act—I contend that there are not many—it was supposed to drive devolution, liberation and accountability.

Julian Sturdy (York Outer) (Con): The hon. Lady is making a powerful argument. One of the real problems we find in York is that NHS Property Services is very distant and difficult to engage with. It needs to sit down with local communities, whether in York, Bristol or elsewhere in the country, and engage with them about the assets that need to be reinvested back in those local communities.

Karin Smyth: That is exactly the point I want to make, but I will go on to show how that is difficult to do and make a difference.

Patients and frontline practitioners were supposed to be front and centre of the new NHS, but that has simply not happened because, as we have heard, control is ever more centralised. It really did not have to be that way. NHS Property Services was set up as a national body, losing a wealth of local expertise and institutional knowledge in the process. With expensive London headquarters, its teams across the regions are stretched. It spent its first period of existence creating a register of assets and a new market rent system. That resulted in disputed and unpaid rents, which necessitated additional loans from the Department of Health to keep the company afloat and a complicated parcelling of subsidy via NHS England to clinical commissioning groups and GP surgeries.

The early years have been an expensive disaster, with GPs and managers across the country not knowing what they were being charged for or who to call to sort out the problems. The profligacy of the system is matched only by its utter uselessness, and that is why I have been pursuing this scandal since I was first elected.

In my constituency two GP health centres and a healthy living centre are directly affected by these problems. The Knowle West healthy living centre was set up in a joint arrangement on Bristol City Council land, with public health services delivered based on the needs of a community that has some of the highest health inequalities in the country. It is no exaggeration to say that for many in the area the centre is a lifeline. However, with public health taken out of the NHS into local government, and the services now largely contracted via a third party, NHS Property Services soon came knocking on the door, bringing with it a charges bill increased by more than 200%. There was no discussion, no legal lease was in place and there was no service level agreement. Not only has the charity that runs the centre been conflicted and convoluted, that is because it is.

It has taken me three years to get even a modicum of progress—lobbying the clinical commissioning group and Bristol City Council, talking to local media, and raising the issue at the Public Accounts Committee and actively on social media, which finally resulted in a helpful meeting with the chair of the NHS Property Services board. The issue is still not resolved, however, and we still have some way to go. It has been a battle. It is tiring for everyone concerned—frontline practitioners in particular—debilitating and, most frustrating of all, entirely avoidable.

South Bristol Community Hospital has a similar story. This facility was the focus of a 60-year campaign by local people, and it finally opened in 2012. Established by a partnership between the primary care trust, private equity and Community Health Partnerships, the local link was severed by the Lansley Act, as I said earlier. Now the board that oversees the community hospital meets far away from Bristol and with no Bristol involvement. An employee of Community Health Partnerships supposedly represents us in overseeing the management of the company that runs the hospital. Community Health Partnerships, like NHS Property Services, is an arm’s length body within the Department of Health and Social Care. The lease of the hospital is managed by a local foundation trust, University Hospitals Bristol, cobbled together in a last-minute deal with the primary care trust. Two other NHS bodies and a social enterprise are also tenants in the building. If that sounds confused, conflicted and convoluted, that is because it is.

I have been campaigning as the local Member of Parliament to get more services into the new hospital. It is a superb new building, with 96 community beds and an urgent care centre. A poll that I carried out among my constituents showed that 90% either were unaware of the services available in the building or felt that it was underused. A 2014 Care Quality Commission report found that the operating theatres were utilised only a quarter of the time, and the out-patient department only 55% of the time. We have made great progress since then, but the building is still underused as part of the health economy—on entering the hospital, people are faced with a whole floor with just a reception desk, and the corridors and lifts are typically empty.

The rehab unit, by contrast, is always full. The nurses, porters and other staff who keep it going all work tirelessly, but there is no escaping the sense that this facility is only rented or temporary. Everything is contractual and faceless, with rules abounding, while stroke patients spend their days and months staring at white walls because, according to the nursing staff, there are limits to what the landlord will allow—for example, there are no pictures.

The community hospital is on the southern fringe of our city, where 30% of residents do not have access to a car and the public transport links are historically among the worst in the United Kingdom. That same community has the highest rates of cancer, diabetes and asthma in Bristol, yet people are still expected to travel miles across the congested city for services that could easily be on their doorstep. I keep repeating the need for local health organisations to see sense, and my hope is that the logic is finally getting through and that we will see more facilities, such as diagnostics and perhaps even scanners, in the near future. Yet why has it taken such effort and such a long time?

South Bristol Community Hospital is perfectly placed to deliver the vision in the five year forward view and the aspiration of the 10-year plan—integrated with social care, providing a front and back door to other services to support the flow in the rest of the health system. However, progress towards those achievable goals is constantly frustrated by the fragmented ownership of the complicated money flows and the unfathomable accountability arrangements. My constituents, without fail, suffer as a result.
Time does not permit me to outline similar problems relating to the shady use of wholly owned companies, but chief among my objections to such companies is that every one of them is a lost opportunity to look at NHS estate management locally on a more joined-up basis, with some local accountability in the system. How can we promote a collaborative approach across healthcare systems when individual trusts go down their own selfish route?

The Naylor review offered some interesting recommendations to simplify the national management of the estate. The Government chose to establish a ministerial board chaired by a Minister at the national level, and it includes everyone—every NHS organisation seems to be on that board. I tried to map the board, who sits on it and how it links back to local communities, but I am afraid I gave up. Perhaps the Minister will help us with that.

Some big and controversial decisions need to be made about the estate, particularly in London, but they are being considered without any engagement with local communities. Not only does that ignore the wellspring of local knowledge that could help avoid a repeat of previous failures, but it fosters a feeling of communities being “done to”, and it makes any change hard—in most cases, impossible—to deliver. Hence, efficiencies that could be ploughed back into local health communities will not be realised.

Communities have been asked to submit estate strategies across their local health communities via the sustainability and transformation plans. They are now being asked to submit bids to a new capital programme, but how will estates run by NHS Property Services and Community Health Partnerships be factored into the mix? In addition to that complicated picture, NHS foundation trusts have their own schemes in play. Control and leverage of community and primary care estates cannot be done at the national level. That simply will not work. We cannot achieve the transformation for the next 10 years that is being talked about without local control of the architecture to deliver it.

When local leaders plan services as part of the sustainability and transformation plans, or whatever the next iteration of that is called, local people must have a say in how those services are delivered. There must be a mechanism to bring the properties, places and assets—and the people running them—back into the sphere of accountability of local health service communities.

Those are not bits of internal housekeeping; they are ways of doing business that are bad for the local health economy, bad for staff and, most importantly, bad for patients and taxpayers. Local communities across the country would like their voice back, and our local NHS would like its money back. The debate needs to do more than shine a light on a problem. I would like the Government to acknowledge that there is a problem and commit to fixing it, because anything less is a dereliction of responsibility and a huge opportunity wasted.

11.17 am

The Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Ms Dorries. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bristol South (Karin Smyth) for bringing such an important issue before the House.

The hon. Lady opened by saying that property may not be the most exciting of topics but, as her speech set out, it is integral to the healthcare service offered in local settings. The substance of her remarks was whether we can better align the property estate with a place-based approach to healthcare. As we move to a more integrated and place-based approach to health, I think there is cross-party consensus that property has an important role to play as an enabler of that. The hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell) kindly recognised that that is very much the approach that I have taken in my post, and my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer (Julian Sturdy) recognised it in expressing his frustration with one or two meetings and asking whether decisions on property are aligned with the place-based approach.

The first point I will make to the hon. Member for Bristol South is that the long-term plan and the future discussions about the NHS give us the opportunity to look at wider system changes around integration and place-based healthcare, and how property aligns with that—for example in York, which has been discussed—as an enabler of change in a more holistic approach. As such, her remarks are timely as part of that wider debate.

The hon. Lady mentioned Knowle West health park, which, if I am honest, I looked at for the first time when preparing for the debate; I was not as sighted on that as I might have been. The issue is that, if NHS England provided that service, the additional market rent costs would have been reimbursed, but because it is provided by the county council they are not. However, as she recognised, there has been progress in recent weeks, thanks in part to her work. I am happy to take forward a discussion on that offline if that would be helpful, because I recognise that it is an important service and that we need to ensure that, where market rents are applied, it is not counterproductive to those services.

However, that should not get in the way of the wider point. The hon. Lady suggested that the new approach is a backwards step. I simply point out that there has actually been significant progress by NHS Property Services. The previous model had the inherent conflict that the primary care trusts were both the landlord and commissioner of the property, and therefore the use of the estate was quite opaque. As a result, we did not get transparency on the true cost of the estate, meaning that inefficiencies were not being flushed out and estates were not being utilised in the most effective way.

One driver of NHS Property Services applying market rents has been the need to encourage better utilisation of the estate by being more transparent on the actual costs. I point out to the hon. Lady that there has been significant progress as a consequence. Some £200 million in capital receipts has been unlocked, 500 capital investment construction projects are being launched each year and running costs have been reduced by £120 million. On balance, as we look forward to the long-term plan and pick up on some issues that the hon. Lady quite rightly highlighted, it is also important to recognise that the old system often allowed estates to be utilised inefficiently. Having truer market rents has actually enabled more transparency and driven efficiencies, with savings then able to be reinvested into the service.

The hon. Lady also mentioned salaries and bonuses, which again are part of a wider question. On the one hand, these are big businesses and their leaderships
[Stephen Barclay]

compete in a competitive market. There is a wider debate within Parliament on the right value to assign to senior salaries in the public sector in order to attract talent. These are big budgets, so we need to attract people of the right ability; it is a false economy to save a relatively small sum on lower salaries for people who then make incorrect decisions that waste much larger sums. At the same time, salaries should reflect the values of the NHS and should not be out of step with others in the NHS. There is a cross-party debate on that, and I am interested in the hon. Lady’s points about it.

The hon. Lady also raised NHS Property Services’ new offices. My understanding is that the previous model was highly inefficient. It had five different properties, so the move to Gresham Street was a consolidation of those five properties into one. That drives productivity, which is a key issue that we need to unlock within the workforce. Two thirds of NHS costs are in the workforce, so driving workforce productivity is a key objective. I am sure the hon. Lady will agree that the workforce is the enabler of system change. That also drives productivity and efficiency that would be harder to achieve if they were disparate across five areas.

The hon. Lady mentioned the impact of the rent adjustment on Bristol. Some 15 GP practices in and around the city of Bristol occupy NHS Property Services sites. NHS England has been working with the Avon local medical committee, practices, NHS Property Services and the Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire clinical commissioning group and has facilitated negotiations between GP practices and NHS Property Services on reviewing the levels of rent and service charges invoiced to GP practices, to ensure that there is transparency on them.

However, as the hon. Lady will be aware, rent and business costs incurred by practices are reimbursed to practices under the premises cost directions, and GPs should be compensated for any rent changes through that route. The Department has provided an additional £127 million to the NHS England mandate, with effect from the 2016-17 financial year, to fund the increased costs in the NHS of this policy change.

**Karin Smyth:** I am grateful for the Minister’s comments about, and work on, Bristol. I agree that the estate was not always particularly well managed in the local health system previously, and that the correct incentives are needed. However, does he agree that he has outlined a merry-go-round of money keeping the entire system afloat? NHS Property Services exists on a large and continuing Department of Health loan, so it is not, in any sense—as the Minister described—a successfully run property business.

**Stephen Barclay:** I was trying to make the point that greater transparency on the true cost of the estate drives behaviour to use the estate more effectively. Part of the difficulty has been that, because the estate was not adequately charged market rents in some areas, moving to a fairer and more transparent assessment of market rents—these things are independently assessed, I hasten to add—is a difficult adjustment. However, a consequence of correctly assessing the value of the estate is the unlocking of efficiencies where the estate is not being utilised, and that money can then be reinvested into the system.

I absolutely agree with the hon. Lady’s wider point, which I took as the substance of her remarks, that property is the enabler of system change. That also came out in the points raised by my hon. Friend the Member for York Outer, and has been inherent in points made by the hon. Member for York Central in our previous discussions. Property does not sit in a silo but is inherent in the wider service offering, and it also plays into reconfigurations. A key part of clinically led reconfigurations of estates to drive productivity will be what property there is to enable that and how to utilise it.

The point on which there is a degree of cross-party consensus, as my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) recognised, is that decisions need to be accountable. Likewise, I am happy to pick up on the point he raised on behalf of his constituents about there being no accountability. That is an absolutely fair challenge to the Department and one that I am very happy to look at. However, I am mindful, as I know he will appreciate, that these are often independent bodies making independent decisions, and we need to look at how they fit into the system.

A further point raised by the hon. Member for Bristol South, although it is slightly outside of the scope of the debate, was about wholly owned subsidiaries, which she also raised in more detail in the estimates debate. I make two points. First, as she knows, subsidiary companies actually give greater flexibility to trusts that want to compete in a local market and perhaps offer higher salaries offset by changes to pensions. That is one way in which trusts are empowered and enabled to hire in a competitive market, for instance in the case of maintenance staff. It is an enabler, and it often results in people getting paid more for a role, although there may be other, less favourable terms and conditions to offset that. I merely point out that those were exactly the arrangements reached for Members, and I do not remember too many press headlines suggesting that Members were being exploited by that change.

Secondly, I remind the hon. Lady that, as I am sure she is well aware, legislation introduced by the last Labour Government enabled wholly owned subsidiaries. Again, I do not recall Labour Ministers, when taking that legislation through the House, suggesting that it would provide a way of exploiting NHS workers or privatising the NHS.

I commend the hon. Lady for the points she raised. This is a timely debate given our discussions with the NHS leadership on the long-term plan. She is absolutely right—Government Members and other Opposition Members also recognised this—about the centrality of property to the place-based approach that we seek to take. I am happy to have a separate discussion with her on how they fit into the system.

**Question put and agreed to.**

11.29 am

139WH

**Sitting suspended.**
Commercial Sexual Exploitation

[IAN PAISLEY in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House has considered tackling demand for commercial sexual exploitation.

I move the motion on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion).

This cannot go on. Our laws against commercial sexual exploitation are failing. They are failing to deter traffickers, failing to prevent pimping—those who profit—and failing victims. Crucially, we have known that for a long time. I have been fortunate to chair the all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade for six or seven years, and I have grown increasingly frustrated that many political parties fail to engage with the issue. It forces us to examine a fundamental question: what do we believe prostitution inherently to be? Personally, I have moved to a position where I feel that it is a form of violence against women and girls; it is institutionalised exploitation for profit. We are forced to examine that question, and that is what this debate is about.

In 2014 the APPG conducted an inquiry into prostitution laws in England and Wales. Our conclusion was stark: because the law sends no clear messages about the nature of prostitution and what the goal of legislation is, it is by default those who are most visible—women selling sex—who are targeted, while men who create the demand in the first place walk away without being held legally accountable for the immense damage they do to individuals and communities.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): To underline my hon. Friend’s point, does not the fact that 50% of women in prostitution in the UK are estimated to have started being paid for sex acts before they were 18 years old expose more than anything the vulnerability of people in this trade and how the almost rosy image that is sometimes given to it is very far away from the reality of what faces them?

Mr Shuker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This goes right to the heart of the question of consent. How is it possible, under our current law, for someone to fail to give consent the day before their 18th birthday, but then to be in a position in which consent is assumed the day after?

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing the debate. I have watched documentaries about the situation around Europe, and whether we are dealing with sex trafficking or the slave trade, for want of a better term, because women are forced into a form of slavery. Things break down at the point of prosecuting men, whether they are just an individual using a prostitute or somebody running a gang. That is where the weakness is, and the law has to be strengthened to start to tackle that. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr Shuker: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I will go on to say, and as other hon. Members will set out, one of the biggest single drivers of trafficking into this country and of child sexual exploitation is commercial sexual exploitation, which is why we need to take all measures to tackle it. Central to my argument, however, is the idea that by failing to tackle demand we perpetuate the inequality of focusing on the most visible part of the transaction, rather than on those who create the demand in the first place.

Michael Tomlinson (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) on securing the debate, and the hon. Gentleman on all the work he does with the all-party group. He mentioned consent. There is a parallel issue of choice. Sometimes it is said that there is a choice. Does he agree that there is more to the question of choice than initially meets the eye, and that “choice” is often driven by poverty, addiction or abuse?

Mr Shuker: I could not agree more. I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that point. There are all sorts of vulnerabilities that would cause someone who would not normally choose to go into the very violent and difficult world of prostitution to do that, but we must take responsibility for all those issues. Equally, prostitution is not a phenomenon driven by an over-supply of women—I am going to talk in gender terms, because this is a highly gendered phenomenon, although obviously we accept that a wide variety of people are involved. It is fundamentally caused not by an over-supply of people growing up wishing to go into prostitution, but by an over-supply of men who think that it is acceptable to purchase sex and to drive the scale of this trade.

Mr Paul Sweeney (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend—a fellow Co-operative Member—on the excellent case he is making on this terrible problem of exploitation in our society. Does he agree with me—I am looking at this particularly in terms of a Co-operative analysis of the economy—that many of the issues are driven by the insecure environments in which women find themselves? What we are talking about is the result of, in particular, poverty, addiction and coercion, but also of insecure work, zero-hours contracts and poor wages. All those things contribute to in-work poverty and are the reasons why women find themselves in those situations.

Mr Shuker: Again, I completely agree. As I will go on to say, a comprehensive model of legal reform would be one in which women who sold sex were decriminalised and those who bought it were subject to criminal sanction, but programmes to boost exit and allow people to go into other, much more secure forms of work are also hugely important.

Today, the Crown Prosecution Service rightly recognises women’s involvement in prostitution as a form of sexual exploitation, yet under existing law women involved in street-based sexual exploitation are criminalised for loitering and soliciting, creating a barrier to exiting and rebuilding their lives. It is currently illegal to place a call card advertising prostitution in a phone box, yet apparently it is perfectly legal for companies to make millions of pounds by knowingly hosting prostitution adverts online. We have an Act to combat modern slavery—the Modern Slavery Act 2015—but it has a huge hole in it, because it fails to acknowledge that prostitution drives sex trafficking.
in the first place. We have a law that prohibits men from soliciting women for sex on the street, but it gives them the green light to walk into a brothel and sexually exploit them behind closed doors.

That is not good enough. As I said to the Minister here this morning, when she very kindly appeared before the Women and Equalities Committee, it has profound implications not just for women involved in prostitution, but for all women, because it perpetuates the myth that men have an absolute right to sex and therefore their sense of entitlement should overwhelm many others in society. The Minister for Women and Equalities, who is also a Secretary of State, put it best when she said earlier this year:

“You cannot help and support people, you cannot give them hope and a chance, you cannot promote human rights or the dignity of every human being—whilst paying them for sex, and whilst funding an industry that exploits them.”

I wholeheartedly agree.

The United Nations, which is having to confront sexual abuse and exploitation within its own ranks, has published a “Glossary on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse” for anyone who is not clear what that means. It states:

“‘Sexual exploitation’s a broad term, which includes a number of acts...including ‘transactional sex’”.

Transactional sex is defined as:

“The exchange of money, employment, goods or services for sexual acts”.

Offering someone money—or drugs, food or a place to stay—in exchange for them performing sex acts is abusive and exploitative. It is never acceptable. The aim of our law must be to end commercial sexual exploitation, not to “manage” it, not to regulate where it happens, not simply to pick up the pieces and not to prevent only the most heinous acts. Our responsibility as lawmakers is clear: it is to end sexual exploitation. And to end sexual exploitation, we have to end the demand.

How to combat demand is not a big mystery. As with any other form of violence against women, it starts with the law sending a clear signal that exploiting someone by paying them for sex is never acceptable, and that those who do will be held to account. We have to shift the burden of criminality away from women who are exploited in the sex trade and place it where it belongs: on those who create the demand. The “end-demand” approach is often referred to as the Nordic model or the sex buyer law. This three-pronged strategy involves criminalising paying for sex, decriminalising selling sex, and providing support and exiting services for people exploited through the sex trade.

France, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland, Iceland and Norway have all adopted end-demand legislation. The first country to do it—this is important—was Sweden, which in 1999 criminalised paying for sex and decriminalised selling it as part of a Government Bill to tackle violence against women. Mia de Fauite, a survivor of prostitution, has said of Sweden’s decision to introduce the law:

“Prostitution is, was and always will be an absolute affront to human dignity and I know that because I have lived and witnessed it. Sweden didn’t do a radical thing or a controversial thing. Sweden just did the right thing in the name of freedom, justice and equality.

Colleagues will speak about the clear and substantial evidence that end-demand legislation works, in Sweden and elsewhere. However, I want to make this point, to the Minister and to the Government: if neighbouring countries are adopting legislation that makes it harder for people to be trafficked and sexually exploited, we run the risk that it will become easier to do that in England and Wales—on our streets and behind closed doors in every community we represent—because there is such a clear basis on which money can be made. We cannot divorce ourselves from what is happening in this great move across much of western Europe.

It is sometimes claimed that making paying for sex a criminal offence would drive prostitution “underground” and make it inherently unsafe. First, it is not possible to make sexual exploitation safe. The moment the money goes on the side or the counter, someone is buying consent and that sex buyer believes that they have an absolute right or entitlement. Secondly, as a recent European Commission study on trafficking points out about that policy, there is

“a logical fallacy at its heart since some level of visibility is required.”

In other words, if I can leave this room today and purchase sex by finding someone’s details online, so can the police. If sex buyers can locate women in prostitution, so can the police and support services.

To quote Detective Superintendent Kajsa Wahlberg, Sweden’s national rapporteur on trafficking in human beings, “prostitution activities are not and cannot be pushed underground. The profit of traffickers, procurers and other prostitution operators is obviously dependent on that men easily can access women who they wish to purchase for prostitution purposes. If law enforcement agencies want to find out where prostitution activities takes place, the police can.”

In Sweden they have been doing that for nearly 20 years. We can look at the evidence of what has happened in that country.

The second myth I want to address is that by fully decriminalising the sex trade—an argument advocated by some—including brothel-keeping and pimping, women are made safer. That could not be further from the truth. It legitimises and fuels demand. Demand is met by significantly increased levels of trafficking. A cross-sectional analysis of up to 150 countries found that trafficking flows are larger into countries where prostitution is legal. That seems logical. Similarly, an analysis of European countries found that sex trafficking was most prevalent in nations with legalised prostitution regimes. The researchers suggested that

“slacker prostitution laws make it more profitable to traffic persons to a country.”

Take the Netherlands, for example. Third-party profiteering was decriminalised there in 2000. Seven years later, the national police force estimated that between 50% and 90% of women in the country’s legal prostitution trade “work involuntarily”. An evaluation of the law in 2007, commissioned by the Dutch Parliament, found that pimping was still “a very common phenomenon” that

“does not seem to have decreased.”

Fieldwork researchers reported that a “great majority” of women in Amsterdam’s infamous window brothels, “works with a so-called boyfriend or pimp.”
Let me make this point: there are few women directly involved in selling sex who profit from it. There is undoubtedly a huge supply of money, estimated by some to be £5 billion or £6 billion of our economy, but that money is not finding its way into the pockets of women who are exploited through this trade; it ends up in the pockets of pimps, exploiters and those who benefit from trafficking.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his speech. I am using this intervention to say that I have been advised that it would be inappropriate for me to speak today, given certain things that are happening in west Yorkshire. He knows that I have been campaigning on this issue for a very long time. This is my opportunity to say that I am here absolutely supporting him.

Mr Shuker: I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend. The Government cannot continue to kick this can down the road. To some degree, all of us are culpable on that. We need comprehensive legislative reform with the aim of tackling demand as its underlying principle. We have a duty as parliamentarians to confront and take action against sexual exploitation, however difficult or uncomfortable that may be. The Government must tackle demand by criminalising paying for sex and decriminalising those who are exploited.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): If hon. Members wish to remove their jackets—including the Clerk and the Hansard Reporters—they are entitled to do so, because of the rudimentary cooling system that we have today. I will, unusually, call Sarah Champion from the same side, because I know that she has been very significant in getting this motion to the House.

2.45 pm

Sarah Champion (Rotherham) (Lab): It is not only a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley; it is also a relief to be able to do so and I thank you for your kindness in enabling it to happen.

We need to recognise that there is a crisis of commercial sexual exploitation in this country. The trafficking and exploitation of vulnerable women and girls around the UK to be sexually abused is taking place on an industrial scale. That is for one simple reason: demand. There are a minority of men in this country who are willing to pay to sexually access women’s bodies. Currently, the law gives them licence to do this. For too long, Parliament has turned a blind eye to the suffering and societal carnage that these men create.

I am here today with two clear messages for the Minister. First, there is a sexual abuse scandal happening right now on her watch. It is enabled by prostitution advertising websites and driven predominantly by heterosexual men who pay for sex. Secondly, there is a solution: making paying for sex a crime to help to stem demand and then helping the women exploited in the sex trade to exit it, by removing penalties for soliciting and providing them with properly resourced support services. The Government and the officials who advise them cannot claim that they did not know what was going on or were not aware of the scale of the problem. To end the exploitation, we have to end the demand.

Let me contextualise the scale of this problem. A recent inquiry into organised sexual exploitation by the all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade, of which I am a member, found that sexual exploitation of women and girls by organised crime groups is widespread across the UK. There are at least 212 active, ongoing police operations into modern slavery cases involving sexual exploitation in the UK. Our inquiry suggests that this represents just a small fraction of the true scale of organised sexual exploitation.

While most police forces do not proactively work to identify all the brothels in their area, some do track them. The scale that they find is astonishing. Leicestershire police visited 156 brothels, encountering 421 women in the year ending 31 December 2017. Some 86% of those women in the brothels were Romanian. Northumbria police visited 81 brothels between March 2016 and April 2018. Of the 259 women they met in the brothels, 75% were Romanian. Over half of those brothels were recorded as connected to other brothels, agencies or non-UK organised crime groups. Greater Manchester police has identified 324 potential new brothel addresses since March 2015. It told our inquiry: “the majority of those identified reflect the hotspot areas for modern slavery in Greater Manchester.”

Let me quote Detective Sergeant Stuart Peall from Lancashire constabulary:

“From what we can evidence there nearly always appears to be a man or some sort of control involved. The females we encounter very rarely pay for their own advertisements. They also don’t pay for their own flights into the UK. There is clear organisation from what we have seen”.

The methods used by these organised crime groups to recruit women include deception, coercion and the exploitation of women and girls’ pre-existing vulnerabilities.

Let us be clear: women who are trafficked by organised crime groups are being subjected not to forced labour, but to rape. Based on evidence from the Poppy Project, Equality Now calculated that, on average, victims are exploited into prostitution for between eight and 20 months. Most women who are trafficked in the UK reported being forced to have sex six or seven days a week and seeing an estimated average of 13 sex buyers per day. From that, we can extrapolate that the average victim of trafficking for sexual exploitation is raped anywhere between 2,798 and 6,828 times. Those rapes are committed by men who pay for sex. If we scale that figure up to the 1,185 women referred to the national referral mechanism in 2017, we start to see the scale of the problem.

We must recognise that commercial sexual exploitation is part of a continuum of violence against women and girls. Commonly, it begins when they are just girls. Many women who are involved in prostitution experienced different forms of abuse, often sexual, when they were children.

The grooming process, and the beginning of a girl’s experience of the continuum of violence, is worth reflecting on. For many girls, it begins with something seemingly innocent, such as getting a slightly older boyfriend and going for car rides with him. Things then become more risky, and she might drink alcohol or smoke cannabis at the boyfriend’s insistence, and the pressure to return the favour with sexual acts then begins. Very quickly, as happened repeatedly in my constituency of Rotherham, that becomes organised sexual exploitation where the
girls are passed between adult men who systematically sexually exploit them in the most horrific ways. Since the events in Rotherham came to light, attitudes in the UK have started to shift towards recognising that those girls are not prostitutes who willingly choose to sell their bodies, but victims who are exploited by men operating in gangs.

Now that child sexual exploitation is viewed as a national crisis, it is time for us to recognise that sexual exploitation does not stop when people turn 18. Instead, the girls who do not get the support they need to escape and repair their lives continue to be sexually exploited, perhaps by the same organised gangs or pimps, into their 20s, 30s and beyond. Finally, after years of campaigning, we consider the grooming and subsequent exploitation of a child to be abhorrent, but we must ask why society's attitude is that when they turn 18, they are suddenly consenting adults who make a choice about selling sex, even when we are aware of past childhood abuse, trafficking, slavery, coercive control, intimidation, violence or drugs and alcohol dependencies in the background.

Let us confront the fact that the term “free choice” rarely, if ever, accurately describes a person’s path into prostitution and the sex trade. Sometimes we are talking about girls who have not escaped their early life trauma, who were perhaps in and out of care, groomed under the influence of drugs in their teens, or repeatedly raped and sexually assaulted throughout their lives. That may sound emotive, but it is corroborated by the supporting statistics. Home Office research shows that 50% of women became involved in prostitution before the age of 18, and three out of four women involved are aged under 21. Another Home Office study in 2016 showed that 70% of the women had spent time in care, and 45% had previously experienced sexual abuse. Do we really believe that those women and girls can give informed consent when many are inherently vulnerable or trapped in a cycle of abuse?

Commercial sexual exploitation is happening on a staggering scale, and prostitution procurement websites, where women are advertised to sex buyers, are key enablers of it. A buyer can go to sites such as Vivastreet or Adultwork, casually search for women in his area where women are advertised to sex buyers, are key enablers of it. A buyer can go to sites such as Vivastreet or Adultwork, casually search for women in his area and contact the mobile number provided to arrange an appointment. It is quick, easy and highly profitable for the web companies. The Joint Slavery and Trafficking Analysis Centre, which is hosted by the National Crime Agency, says that those prostitution websites “represent the most significant enabler of sexual exploitation in the UK”.

Claims that the sites enhance women’s safety are deeply misguided. Prostitution advertising websites significantly increase the ease and scale of organised sexual exploitation in this country.

Thankfully, other countries have started to act. Since the United States signed into law the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act of 2017 earlier this year, Adultwork and a host of other sites have shut down their prostitution adverts there. In France, the Paris prosecutor launched an official investigation on charges of aggravated pimping into Vivastreet, which has since shut down its prostitution adverts in France. In Britain, our inadequate laws against commercial sexual exploitation prohibit a person from placing a call card for prostitution in a phone booth but allow companies such as Vivastreet to make millions advertising women online. That has to change urgently.

This week, Vivastreet claimed that it is “working closely with the Home Office to help develop an industry-wide approach to identifying and preventing online trafficking.” That is not enough. The Government must take on corporate pimps, not collaborate with them.

Our law needs to be updated so that it clearly sets out that it is a criminal offence to facilitate or profit from someone else’s prostitution. Under section 53A of the Sexual Offences Act 2003, it is already an offence to buy sex from a person who has been subject to force, coercion or exploitation by a third party, which means it does not have to be proved that the buyer was aware of the exploitation of the person they were paying for sex with. Sadly, research by Dr Andrea Matolcsi of Bristol University in 2017 suggested that there was only a low level of awareness of the offence and that the maximum fine of £1,000 did not deter buyers.

Our laws are simply not fit for purpose. To reduce demand for prostitution and sex trafficking, the law has to send a clear message that it is never acceptable to exploit someone by paying them for sex. To do that, the Government should urgently extend the existing prohibition against paying for sex in a public place to make it a criminal offence in all locations.

Although prostitution websites facilitate commercial sexual exploitation, they are not the root cause. The root cause is demand. Only a minority of men pay for sex. A study of 6,000 men by University College London found that 3.6% of men reported having paid for sex in the last five years. The men who were more likely to have paid for sex were young professionals with high numbers of unpaid sexual partners, which quashes the myth that the sex trade is a place of last resort for the lonely few. It is the demand of those men that drives the supply of mainly vulnerable women and girls into the sex trade. It is the money of those buyers that lines the pockets of the pimps and traffickers. The sex trade, and all the harm and suffering it entails, exists because of them.

Let me be clear: someone paying someone else to perform sex acts on them is abuse, just as exchanging accommodation, employment, services or other goods in return for sex is sexual abuse. A man who pays for sex is not a regular consumer, innocently availing themselves of a worker’s services. Offering someone money, goods or services for sex is sexual coercion. It is a form of violence against women.

Globally, 96% of victims of sexual exploitation are women and girls. When people pay for sex, they undergo a convenient act of forgetting. Only 44% of sex buyers who took part in a London-based study thought that prostitution had a very or extremely negative impact on women, which shows that many people who pay for sex ignore the fact that the women they pay for are likely to be vulnerable, may be in desperate need of money to pay off debts to their pimp, and have little or no agency in the situation. They do not think about the life or events that lead a woman to being in a brothel as opposed to working in an office or a shop.

There has rightly been outrage about the recently publicised cases of men working for aid agencies who exploited women overseas by paying them for sex, but
where is the outrage when they come back to this country and sexually abuse in our own backyard? Across the UK, men are paying to sexually exploit vulnerable women and girls who they have shopped for online. We need to join the dots between prostitution, modern slavery, sex trafficking and child sexual exploitation. The common thread is men who pay to sexually access the bodies of women and girls.

There is no separate and distinct market specifically for sex-trafficked victims; the market is for sex. Detective Constable Julie Currie of the Metropolitan police’s modern slavery and kidnapping unit told the APPG:

“In the vast majority of cases, males paying for sex would give no thought to where the woman has come from or what circumstances have led her into prostitution.”

As Dr Maddy Coy from Florida University states:

“Policy approaches which presume a distinct market for the purchase of girls’ bodies for sex from that of the adult women are blinkered to the myriad of connections that span the age of majority.”

What links these forms of exploitation is the men who pay to abuse women and girls, their sexist attitude of entitlement and objectification, and the sex inequality that underpins it. Crucially, we need to acknowledge that there is nothing inevitable about this exploitation, and that we can and must take action to tackle demand from men who exploit vulnerable people by paying for sex.

I say to the Minister today that to reduce the demand for prostitution and sex trafficking, the law has to send a clear message that it is never acceptable to exploit someone by paying for sex. To do that, the Government should urgently extend the existing prohibition against paying for sex in a public space to make it a criminal offence in all locations. At the same time, it is vital that people exploited through prostitution are not criminalised, but instead supported to exit prostitution and access the services they need. As a result, penalties for loitering and soliciting should be removed from the statute book.

This “end demand” approach to prostitution is often referred to as the Nordic model, or the sex buyer law. So far it has been adopted in Sweden, Norway, France, the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, so it is already in operation on UK soil. We urgently need to extend this legislation to the rest of the UK.

There is extensive evidence of the effectiveness of the sex buyer law in reducing demand. In Sweden, which was the first country to adopt an “end demand” approach back in 1999, anonymous surveys conducted in 1996 and 2008 revealed that the proportion of men in Sweden who reported paying for sex dropped from 13% to 8% in that period. The most recent study of prevalence rates found that 0.8% of men in Sweden had paid for sex in the previous 12 months, which is the smallest proportion recorded in two decades and the lowest in Europe.

Crucially, public attitudes have changed. In 1996, 45% of women and 20% of men in Sweden supported criminalising paying for sex. By 2008, support for such criminalisation had risen to 79% of women and 60% of men. That is the point of the law—it changes attitudes and prevents commercial sexual exploitation from happening in the first place.

Reducing demand also makes countries more hostile destinations for traffickers. A review of the sex buyer law in Norway concluded:

“A reduced market and increased law enforcement posit larger risks for human traffickers... The law has thus affected important pull factors and reduced the extent of human trafficking in Norway in comparison to a situation without a law.”

Similarly, the head of Stockholm police’s prostitution unit has pointed out:

“How will the traffickers survive without sex buyers? The sex buyers are the crucial sponsors of organised crime. The traffickers are not into this because of sex... They are in this because of the money.”

Payi ng to sexually access another person’s body is a choice—a choice to abuse. The law must serve as a deterrent and send a clear message that society will not stand idly by while a minority of men exploit vulnerable women and girls.

Changing the law around the selling and buying of sex is crucial to prevent sexual exploitation, but there are other ways in which we can reduce demand. We should seek to change attitudes towards women, exploitation and abuse through education. We need to confront the uncomfortable truth that many children are being groomed for sexual exploitation from an early age, so we really need age-appropriate relationship education in primary schools. When it comes to reducing the demand for commercial sexual exploitation, we should also educate boys about respecting women's bodies, about gender-based violence and about negative gender stereotypes. That is why I am very sad that last week the Secretary of State for Education rowed back on his commitment to introduce relationships education in 2019; now it will hopefully be introduced in 2020.

Providing routes out of commercial sexual exploitation is also important. Solutions are required that provide wraparound care at the moment that a woman presents in crisis. The Modern Slavery (Victim Support) Bill, which proposes the provision of up to 12 months of rehabilitative care, recovery and support for victims, could be vital in ensuring that vulnerable women and girls are fully supported in their exit from prostitution.

In line with that, the Government need to properly fund sexual violence support services, such as Rape Crisis, which are struggling to keep up with demand. As the MP for Rotherham, I have witnessed to what happens when, confronted with the evidence of widespread sexual abuse, those in authority have looked a way; when they have described exploitation as a choice; when they have dismissed it, or minimised it; and when they have known about it but failed to do all they could to prevent it.

We have a duty to act now, not to look away. It is time for this Government to recognise that prostitution is a form of violence against women and girls. I urge the Minister to legislate now to end demand by criminalising those who pay for sex and by closing the loophole that enables websites to facilitate abuse. Being abused is not a choice, but our seeming indifference to it is.
Although some British nationals, especially young people, are affected, as we have heard, commercial sexual exploitation now often affects foreign nationals who have been trafficked here and are vulnerable. A Police Foundation study in Bristol found that only 17% of the people providing sexual services in the city’s brothels were British.

Prostitution and the commercial sex industry are intrinsically linked with modern slavery. As we have heard, the market for commercial sex operates as a pull for traffickers and organised crime groups. It is heart-rending when one hears accounts from organisations such as Hope for Justice. I believe that the daily figure of 13 sex buyers a day mentioned by the hon. Member for Rotherham is often a gross underestimate. I remember an account from the founder of Hope for Justice, which rescues trafficked women from prostitution. On one occasion he was told about a young girl who had been rescued. One day she had decided she would count how many men had abused her that day. After 100 she stopped counting.

To reduce modern slavery we must reduce the demand that creates the market in which so many people are exploited. That is why I support what has been said here today. At the same time, we must also provide real exit routes for women who are trapped in prostitution. It is not enough to say, “You can have health checks and clean condoms.” They need genuine opportunities to gain education, to be rehoused, and to understand how they can support themselves in a different way, because they often see themselves as having no alternatives at all.

The Conservative party human rights commission, which I chair, is in the middle of its own inquiry into the different legal approaches to prostitution and the impact they have on the fight against modern slavery. I am very pleased to see the evidence coming through now from the countries where “end demand” legislation has been implemented, including in Northern Ireland, where the law is fairly new. The police have found the offence much more effective than the partial offence that existed before, which we still have here. I congratulate the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland on securing its first conviction two weeks ago in a contested court case following the implementation of the new law.

The culture has been changed in Sweden, as we have heard. It is now considered almost demeaning to pay for sex there. Only a minority of men in this country pay for sexual services—only about 11% of men have ever paid for sex and only 3.6% have done so in recent years, according to the most recent survey data published. However, their behaviour harms individuals, fuels organised crime and contributes to the global networks of modern slavery.

Many people suggest that the law should not intervene in matters of prostitution. They say that that would stray into regulating the behaviour of consenting adults, but, as we have heard, one of those people, often not an adult, is not consenting. The law needs to be looked at again. If the cost of protecting such extremely vulnerable people from exploitation and modern slavery is to reduce the choices of a small group of people, it is a cost we should be prepared to pay.

I welcome the research that the Government have commissioned into the scale and nature of prostitution in England and Wales, and I commend the Minister for
her own interest in the subject. I look forward to the findings of that report. I hope that perhaps during the summer recess the Minister will have an opportunity to read Rachel Moran's book and that the researchers undertaking work of the inquiry will look at it, too.

3.14 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is a pleasure to speak on this issue, which I have a great interest in. I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) on setting the scene. I will give the Northern Ireland perspective and describe what we have done legislatively. I suggest the Minister does the same here on the mainland, because it is the way forward.

Two weeks ago a court in Northern Ireland convicted a man in the first case to be contested under the legislation introduced in 2015, under which it is an offence to pay for, or, in this particular case, attempt to pay for, the sexual services of another person. One might be forgiven for thinking it has taken some time for the first conviction to be made, but, in addition to that case, data up to the end of March this year records 13 individuals who have been cautioned or received another discretionary disposal having admitted their guilt.

Would I like to see the Police Service of Northern Ireland making greater use of the offence? Yes, I certainly would, and so would you, Mr Paisley. However, the arrests show that this simple offence is much more effective than the more complex offence we had before. Previously our law targeted kerb crawlers who seek to buy sex in public and those who purchase sexual services from a person subjected to force, which are the laws that England and Wales still have. The kerb crawling offence has limitations because it can address only those who seek to purchase sex in a public place, yet research suggests that the majority of prostitution in the UK now happens indoors in brothels, private residences and hotels. The offence that applies where a person is subjected to force is difficult to apply because, although there is no requirement that the offender know about the coercion, there needs to be proof that the coercion is happening, which is not always easy to document in the time required by a relatively low-level offence. PSNI statistics show that no one was arrested or charged for that offence in the whole time that it operated, so the change in legislation has given the PSNI the power it needs to be effective and to change attitudes. I respectfully suggest to the Minister that we need such changes here on the mainland.

Michael Tomlinson: One objection to the sex buyer law is that it has been used only in Nordic countries that have a different jurisdiction from our own. The examples that the hon. Gentleman is giving are powerful because they show that our own jurisdiction can cope with such laws and that they work.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I agree wholeheartedly with him.

We changed the law in Northern Ireland because we needed a law that would enable us to tackle the demand for commercial sexual exploitation more effectively. The Northern Ireland Assembly overwhelmingly supported the provision by 81 votes to 10, with the four largest parties in the Assembly—the Democratic Unionist party, Sinn Féin, the Social Democratic and Labour party and the Ulster Unionist party—in support. Both Unionists and nationalists supported the legislation. Lord Morrow, who was a Member of the Assembly at the time, was one of those who did the good work.

People are easily moved around the UK, across the border with the Republic of Ireland and more widely within Europe. Germany and the Netherlands, which have legalised prostitution, have become destination countries for so-called sex tourists and also for traffickers and their victims. Legalisation has not stamped out organised crime or trafficking. It has not worked. The change that we have had in Northern Ireland is needed here. Fighting sex trafficking by using the criminal justice system might even be harder in the legalised prostitution sector.

Some might ask, “Why tackle the demand at all?” The simple answer is that without the demand for paid sex there would be no need for a continuing supply of women tricked, bullied or forced by circumstances into prostitution. Reducing the demand is the key to reducing the number of people who end up in commercial sexual exploitation and is the key to reducing human trafficking.

I want to quote from a lady who addressed the Northern Ireland Assembly and came here as well. Her name is Mia de Faúite. She spoke powerfully at an event in Stormont to mark the coming into force of the offence of purchasing sex, and spoke in this House as well. She said:

“It is my firm belief that everybody on this Island be they born here or not is entitled to live a dignified life, and prostitution is the systematic stripping of one’s human dignity and I know that because I have lived and witnessed it, and it must no longer be tolerated and now in Northern Ireland the next generation of girls, will grow up knowing that the bodies to which they have been born into are respected and at no time will they ever be up for sale.”

She spoke at an event that took place here in Westminster, which I co-hosted with the hon. Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) and the former Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi). Women and girls across the whole of the UK deserve the same freedom. Northern Ireland has led the way in the British Isles. The Republic of Ireland followed suit, and it is now time for England, Scotland and Wales to join us. Taking action to tackle the demand for commercial sexual exploitation is the first step, and I encourage the Minister to follow the actions of those in Northern Ireland. That is the way forward.

3.19 pm

Ronnie Cowan (Inverclyde) (SNP): I shall keep my remarks short, and hopefully then the hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Jess Phillips) will be able to speak. While I was gathering my thoughts for the debate, I was reminded by a number of people of the importance of the terminology and language I should adopt. I discovered that two groups of people on the same side of the debate disagree about that language and terminology. Experience tells me that as a man I am walking on eggshells, but we shall never change the world for the better if we cannot enter into an open and honest debate about issues that matter. The issue we are debating matters, and we all want a better world, so I apologise to those whom I may be about to offend. It is not my intention to disrespect them or their views, but I am
putting my views as a man attempting to help, in a world where people—primarily women—are abused by men.

Most sex buyers are male, and that group pays predominantly for sexual access to the bodies of women. Therefore it is important that young men should be raised not to see women as a commodity to be bought and sold. If we do not deal with that, women will, as has happened in other countries, be trafficked and sold into a deeply exploitative trade, to supply the demand. A five-country study, led by the Immigration Council of Ireland, of men who paid for sex concluded that “irrespective of a buyers’ knowledge of human trafficking as a crime and as a phenomenon, it is unlikely that they will consider the possibility that a seller may be a victim of trafficking when purchasing sex.”

We need to educate those doing the buying, before they even start.

The overwhelming majority of people exploited through the sex trade are highly vulnerable even before they become involved, and suffer acute harm as a result. Prostitution is about violence and control. Mia de Faoite—sorry, Mia; four or five people have butchered her second name this afternoon—is an activist and survivor of prostitution. She said, when asked why men pay for sex:

“I think it’s partly the fact that they can and society says they can and the law says they can... You must ask yourself what are they buying? It’s power. It’s a very powerful thing to have control of someone else’s body in that way. It’s a power-fix and they know it”.

We can legislate, and we may get it right. In that case we help, even if we do not completely resolve the situation. If we legislate and get it wrong we could drive prostitution underground, and that would be disastrous for those being trafficked and abused.

Criminalising paying for sex while decriminalising selling sex has been shown to reduce demand for sexual exploitation, change public attitudes, and make countries more hostile destinations for traffickers. In recognition of the centrality of combating demand in preventing sex trafficking, the Council of Europe recommended that states adopt that approach “as the most effective tool for preventing and combating trafficking in human beings”.

I acknowledge that it is not perfect, but I believe it is the best path forward. The only way we can guarantee to resolve the issue is by reducing demand to zero. Demand for prostitution is not inevitable. Prevalence rates vary over time and between countries. Demand is context-dependent, based on a decision-making process by each man who pays to exploit someone sexually.

Most men do not pay for sex. It is a minority who do. We should have a UK-wide education programme, countering the growing normalisation of sexual exploitation. Through a concerted body of education we should aim to create a society where the concept of buying a person is inconceivable.

3.23 pm

Jess Phillips (Birmingham, Yardley) (Lab): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley.

I ask the Minister to reflect on the fact that in the main Chamber today Members are considering a Government Bill to stop the sale of part of an animal from other countries. They are legislating to reduce demand for ivory. They are acting, by means of a Bill. At exactly the same moment, there are women face down being abused in this country, who have been trafficked from somewhere else or exploited here. Ivory is an important subject for me, but it is not as important as the girls in my kids’ class, and it never will be, so I ask the Government to act and not to keep kicking the matter into review after review. We can act for elephants; we should act for women.

Normally I spend time in this place giving voice to victims, or to women—standing up and speaking the voices of people who have got in touch with me. Today I want to give voice to some of the punters of sex work, to try to prove that paying for sex is not like paying for any other service; it is abuse. I apologise, because some of this is not particularly pleasant. I have three quotations from men who reviewed women they had exploited on the prostitution review website Punternet. The first states:

“This is a classic case of ‘the pretty ones don’t have to work hard’. Vicky is beautiful, but frankly can’t be arsed. She’s Polish, and her English is not good... I was reminded of the Smiths song ‘Girlfriend in a Coma’... All the while she seemed completely disinterested and mechanical... After a while, during which she remained completely unresponsive, I offered to lick her—she was stubby, which I dislike, but carried on regardless, and got the same lack of response... I finally decided to fuck her, in mosh. Her pussy was hot and tight and I came after less than ten minutes. All the while, she kept her face turned to one side.”

The next stated:

“Very pretty and young girl. Approximately 165 cm tall, nice legs and beautiful breast, nice skin. Very young... If you want to try a fresh, young (says she is 18) and pretty girl is ok, but maybe as she just started to work, is quite passive, scarcely kiss without tongue, doesn’t want to be kissed on the neck or ears, can’t do a decent blowjob and really rides badly on you, i had to stop her several times when she tried to use her mouth or when she got up on me. She really can’t speak a word of English”. The writer says that he thinks she is Romanian “or something like that”; and that her English is “zero”.

The third stated:

“Saw this girl’s pictures on the other site and thought she looked nice. How wrong I was. She does NOT offer any of the services offered and actually had the cheek to ask for more money to perform things that she is advertising as part of her services!!! Her attitude was derisory... I did have sex with her which was a bit like shagging a blow up doll. I should have asked for my money back but given the very dodgy looking bloke with a very aggressive dog downstairs I thought it best to just get out as fast as possible.”

Lovely. So that is just like any other service then. I would ask all Members of the House to think about people speaking of their daughters, wives and mothers, and the women who live in their constituencies, in that way.

There is a significant parallel between domestic violence and prostitution. The all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade found that the ‘boyfriend’ model described by my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) was a common way to coerce women into the sex trade from existing relationships. It is fairly uncommon that people get caught for that, but the following text message conversation is between two men who were convicted of sex trafficking...
in the UK last year. It is between Razvan Mitru, the lead member of the trafficking gang, and Alexandru Pitigoi. They are discussing recruiting Pitigoi’s girlfriend, lead member of the trafficking gang, and Alexandru in the UK last year. It is between Razvan Mitru, the lead member of the trafficking gang, and Alexandru Pitigoi. They are discussing recruiting Pitigoi’s girlfriend, lead member of the trafficking gang, and Alexandru Pitigoi’s girlfriend to brothels in the UK and openly acknowledge what they want to do.

Pitigoi texted:
“let me talk to her too cause she doesn’t really want anymore”. Pitigoi replied “why:))”) Pitigoi answered:
“cause she is not happy about it”.

Mitru:
“what the fuck is she not happy about?”

Pitigoi:
“and she doesn’t really like it as you can imagine it’s hard on her bro”.

Mitru:
“she doesn’t have a penny in her pocket and she is being fussy maybe it is hard for her but if she fucked at least she knows what for not for nothing”. Pitigoi replied, “I know that:))”

I have met that woman hundreds of times. A review is not enough. I ask the Minister to do everything that was set out by my hon. Friends the Members for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and for Rotherham, and to do it now.

3.28 pm

Angela Crawley (Lanark and Hamilton East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley. I congratulate the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and for Rotherham, and to do it now.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

Commercial Sexual Exploitation

3.32 pm

Carolyn Harris (Swansea East) (Lab): I congratulate all Members who have spoken on their passionate and moving speeches. I, for one, was extremely moved.

Prostitution is a nationwide issue. Women are selling their bodies on streets up and down the country, putting their health and safety at risk. Prostitution is violence against women and girls. Each time a woman is met by a purchaser to trade a sex act for money, drugs, food or some other commodity, she is in a potentially life-endangering situation. Prostitution causes damage to those involved with it, and it can never be made completely safe.

Prostitution is the abuse of vulnerable women. Last summer I spent quite a lot of time in Swansea talking to women who were engaged in, and victims of, prostitution. One lady I met had lost her six-year-old daughter in a road accident 30 years ago. Thirty years ago I lost my eight-year-old son in a road accident. Thirty years ago the woman I met turned to alcohol and drugs to numb the pain because she had no support or family. She needed
something to take the edge off it, which led her into prostitution. I, thankfully, had a loving family around me. I was cosseted and nurtured, and I am standing here today. The maxim, “There but for the grace of God go I” is so true when we do not know what is around the corner. I also noted that this woman was heavily bruised. She is in her late 50s, and I commented that she had really bad facial scarring and bad black eyes. She said, “This happens all the time. This is because I didn’t give good service.” These women hold themselves entirely responsible for not giving the service that is demanded of them by the purchasers.

Young women and girls are on the street or in backstreet brothels, selling their bodies for as little as £5, or in exchange for drugs and alcohol or, in some cases, for food or bed for the night. Those women are not dressed in expensive clothes and fancy shoes; they are in grubby tracksuits and trainers. The idea that prostitution is a choice that women have is simply not true. People are pushed into exploitative and harmful situations because they are trying to survive.

We must understand and address the root cause of prostitution, which is normally a man’s demand for sex. Using prostitutes has become so normalised that men now go to brothels with their friends before a night out. The stigma of men paying for sexual services has vanished, yet the stigma of women selling their bodies remains.

As we have heard, the sex buyer law on prostitution decriminalises all those who are prostituted. It provides support services to help people to exit prostitution, and it makes buying people for sex a criminal offence, in order to reduce the demand that drives sex trafficking. It makes it clear that buying people for sex is abhorrent and wrong, and it sanctions discouraging people from doing it.

Education programmes in schools, and training for police, other emergency services and frontline professionals, is vital to target sex traffickers and help those women who need support. A lack of understanding could put women straight back into the hands of their abusers—even women I met who had been involved in prostitution were there because she repeatedly went back into the same abusive relationship, time after time, as if it was her only option and there was nothing else for her. Women need to feel that they have a place to go, and that help, support and people are available to help them break that cycle.

Women involved in prostitution should have access to excellent, reliable and life-changing information and support. They should be treated fairly, positively and—most important—respectfully, and they should be given genuine alternatives to a life of prostitution, regardless of where they find themselves. If that is not provided, those women will never break away from the situation they are in. Britain must become a hostile place for sex traffickers and other third-party profiteers of sexual exploitation. That requires a holistic approach that puts prevention at its heart, while mobilising all available measures to disrupt and robustly respond to sexual exploitation. There is no argument other than that prostitution is violence against women and girls, and we must always fight to protect women and girls from living a life of violence and abuse. These women need help and support; they do not need prison sentences or criminal records. They need our help, and they need it now.

3.38 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Victoria Atkins): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Paisley, and I thank the hon. Members for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) and for Luton South (Mr Shuker) for securing this important debate on tackling the demand for commercial sexual exploitation. We have a full Public Gallery, and I am sure this debate is being watched on television. The accounts that have been given have clearly touched many people, and they have shown in an incredibly compelling way the risks, harms and agony that prostitution can cause to those who are most vulnerable. I also thank the all-party group on prostitution and the global sex trade for its work in this area. I am pleased to see so many of its members present in the debate, and I thank them for their report, which I read with great care.

I thank Members for addressing the House in a compelling but hard-hitting way. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Fiona Bruce) talked about the fallacy of choice and the loss of self. Those are phrases that were borne out in the quotations that the hon. Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) gave of a lady whose life path changed 30 years ago and who has suffered the terrible consequences of that. I also thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), who has brought the developments occurring in Northern Ireland to the Chamber. I will be watching with interest the results of that change in their law.

The Government’s priority is to protect those selling sex from harm and exploitation and to target those who exploit vulnerable people and those involved in exploitation. Just this afternoon, a group of people are meeting just along the corridor to discuss how we can prevent exploitation in hand car washes. We know that nail bars are another area rich for exploitation. Of course, the most difficult area of exploitation is the sex industry involving adults and children.

I come to this matter drawing on my experience outside the House. I used to prosecute serious organised crime. I remember a woman who I defended many years ago. She was caught because she had illegal documentation. This was back in the 2000s, when sadly we had a different attitude towards victims of slavery. I am pleased to say we have much improved it since. She told me her story, through her interpreter, of how she came to be in our country. It was a tale not dissimilar to the tales we have heard already today. She showed me her wrists—I remember this; it haunts me—and they bore the physical scars of her experience in a brothel that she had managed to escape. She was treated as a criminal for having documentation papers that were not legitimate, and I am genuinely so pleased to say I have complete confidence that now she would be picked up, put into the national referral mechanism, treated as a victim and supported through her journey to a better life. I feel as though she and the many, many other women we have heard about are sitting in this Chamber with us as we debate this topic today.
As a Minister, however, I cannot proceed only on the basis of compelling, heartbreaking stories; I have to proceed on the basis of evidence. That is why we have commissioned research through the University of Bristol to understand the scale and nature of prostitution in the 21st century. We know it is different from how it was 10 years ago through the proliferation of the online sites that the hon. Member for Rotherham described, which I will deal with in a moment.

Jim Shannon: The Minister said clearly that she would look at the legislation in Northern Ireland. Will those who are doing the research to which she has just referred look at the evidence of what Northern Ireland has done, the change it has made, including in attitudes, and its success?

Victoria Atkins: It is a team of respected academics in the field, and it would not be right for me as a Minister to their research. I am sure they will be looking at the example the hon. Gentleman mentions, as they will look at other examples across Europe. It is something I can look at, too.

Before I descend into the details, I add that I am pleased that colleagues have talked about the role that education has in tackling demand. Colleagues will know that I spend a lot of time talking about that when it comes to how some crimes are perpetuated against women and girls. Relationships education is absolutely key. The hon. Member for Rotherham mentioned the Secretary of State for Education. My understanding is that while some schools will be in a position to provide this education very quickly because they have the teachers and skill sets available, other schools are not quite at that place. We are trying to help them get to that place so that the policy is consistent and high-quality across the country.

The acts of buying and selling sex are not in themselves illegal in England and Wales, but many activities that can be associated with prostitution are offences, and we have heard about them today. When those offences were designed, the basis of them was to protect vulnerable people involved in prostitution. They relate to activities such as controlling prostitution and buying sex from someone who has been a victim of trafficking. We are aware of the different legislative approaches taken elsewhere, including the Nordic model and the regulated commercialised approach in Germany and the Netherlands. We are seeking unequivocal evidence as to whether any one approach is better than others at tackling harm and exploitation. That must remain our priority.

Mr Shuker: The Minister has referred to the research that is going ahead. Does she not agree that if a large number of women who are involved in prostitution are being exploited—however we define that—and a small minority appear to work relatively freely and not under those same conditions, that small minority should not be able to outweigh the huge number of people being exploited? Should public policy not seek to reduce the impact on the most vulnerable first and foremost?

Victoria Atkins: That is a perfectly fair and proper question. It is a question that I will have to answer when we have the independent research, which we will be able to analyse. I understand why colleagues are anxious to act immediately, but I have to act on the basis of academic research and evidence.

Jess Phillips: I know that the Minister cannot direct the research, but I have read various reports in my time working in this field. Amnesty’s report is one that is often cited against me by those who work with women who worked with women in the national referral mechanism. Can the Minister ensure that women in the national referral mechanism, which the Government have access to, are taken account of in the research? I cannot remember a single trafficked woman ever being asked their opinion in any research piece that I have ever seen.

Victoria Atkins: I am conscious of the independence of the researchers and of giving the research the weight and respect I hope and expect it to be given. I am a little bit cautious about trying to interfere. With my modern slavery responsibilities, I am conscious of the impact of sex trafficking on people in the NRM. There is that body of evidence there as well, and the hon. Lady is absolutely right to point it out.

I am conscious of time, and I want to give hon. Members time to respond.

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): You don’t have to.

Victoria Atkins: I am grateful, Mr Paisley.

Members have spoken compellingly about what can be done by criminal gangs who traffic and pimp women. We are looking at whether prohibition is the most effective policy response to that. We know there are some evaluations and research pointing to the benefits and negative impacts of the Nordic model. It is a contentious area, and a lot of conflicting and contradictory evidence is cited on both sides of the debate. That is why I am currently having to tread the path that I am. As I say, we are doing more to develop our evidence base. We have commissioned research from the University of Bristol. We anticipate that it will take a year to complete, with a final report expected in April next year. From that, we can look at the evidence and analyse what the best approach is.

As I have said, we know that the picture on prostitution has changed from what it was even just 10 years ago. We need to understand the nature and scale of the issue, so that we understand the potential consequences, both intended and unintended, of any changes to legislation.

Fiona Bruce: The Minister is responding very thoughtfully to the comments that have been made, but will she give us her view on whether prostitution is fundamentally exploitative and the act of prostitution is a form of violence against women and girls? Whatever the researchers say, those of us who are concerned about this matter would be interested to know her view on that, having heard today’s debate.

Victoria Atkins: My hon. Friend puts me in a difficult position, given that we have commissioned the research and are very clear that it has to be respected by people from across the spectrum of views, and that we will review it appropriately. I do not feel able to give my personal view given that I am speaking on behalf of Her Majesty’s Government. I will say that I sat on the Home Affairs Committee some time ago when it conducted a report into prostitution. That report came to a certain viewpoint, but there were many shades of view in that report. I feel it is right that colleagues know that.

We are clear that we have to help victims, by protecting them and helping them to leave prostitution and get into the way of life that they seek outside prostitution.
[Victoria Atkins]

We are not waiting for the publication of the research for that to happen. We have provided more than £2 million to organisations supporting sex workers, including the £650,000 from the violence against women and girls service transformation fund that we have given to the police and crime commissioner of Merseyside to provide a victim-focused service for sex workers—


Victoria Atkins: And prostitutes who are victims of, or at risk of, sexual or domestic violence, abuse, exploitation or human trafficking. I have used both words deliberately through my speech.

Sarah Champion: Only one is correct.

Victoria Atkins: Forgive me. In that case, may Hansard note that when I have said “sex workers”, I was referring also to prostitutes, and vice versa? I do not want to fall over on the language, as other hon. Members have mentioned.

In addition, our focus on protecting victims extends to the £13 million trusted relationships fund, which we launched in February. [Interruption.] I am sorry about my microphone, Mr Paisley—it seems to be doing something. I do not have Siri on me, just in case anyone is wondering. The trusted relationships fund will provide funding over four years for initiatives to protect the most vulnerable young people from child sexual exploitation and wider forms of criminal exploitation. We have received more than 100 expressions of interest from local authorities for initiatives aimed at developing the protection that builds resilience in children and increases the consistency and quality of support for children and young people who are at risk.

The Government’s strategy to tackle sex trafficking facilitated via online classified advert sites, otherwise known as adult service sites, comprises three main strands of activity. First, the National Crime Agency is leading a multi-agency operational plan to investigate, disrupt and prevent sex trafficking facilitated via such websites. I have visited the unit at which that work is done. Again, I thank the officers involved in that work. They sit at computer screens, see the websites, read words very similar to those that have already been cited in the debate, and they then have to find a way of dealing with that when they leave the office and go home to their loved ones. My eternal thanks and gratitude go to them for doing that.

Secondly, the operational push is supported by the development and use of innovative technological capabilities to identify trafficking online. Thirdly, in support of the work the Home Office has spoken to the largest adult services websites operating in the UK so that it takes a proactive role in identifying trafficking-related material and preventing such material from being hosted. I am clear that the websites have a responsibility. Through engagement with such industries, we seek to ensure that they do what they should to ensure that their sites do not host criminal and exploitative behaviour.

Colleagues have mentioned the United States’ approach. Alongside our current work, we continue to monitor the impact in the US of the recent change in legislation brought in by the Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act, known as FOSTA. The Act gives sex trafficking victims more power to sue websites that knowingly support sex trafficking. Although such an approach has much to commend it at first blush, we are conscious of some emerging evidence that the prohibition of such sites results in the displacement, rather than the prevention, of abuse, and disperses trafficking-related advertisements across myriad smaller websites where they are harder to investigate. However, we will keep looking at that and see whether there are lessons to be learned from that approach, and from approaches elsewhere.

Sarah Champion: Will the Minister give way?

Victoria Atkins: Yes, although I am just about to finish so that the hon. Lady has a chance to respond.

Sarah Champion: I will give my time to the Minister, because I would really like her to answer three questions. First, will she legislate to ensure that websites cannot financially benefit from exploited women? Secondly, will she stop criminalising women who are forced into prostitution? Thirdly, will she criminalise both the buyers and those who force women, and benefit from forcing women, into prostitution?

Ian Paisley (in the Chair): The Minister has two and a half minutes.

Victoria Atkins: I am so sorry—I was unable to note all the questions. I suspect and hope that this is the first of a programme of debates that we will have on this issue in the period while the research is being developed. May I take those questions away? The hon. Lady will appreciate that I cannot commit to legislate on my feet in Westminster Hall—would that it were so—but I undertake to write to her on those points. She knows, given the work that she has done in other areas and on other matters, that I am always more than willing to listen; indeed, it is my privilege to do so. I will take away her questions and consider them, and we will see where we get to.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered tackling demand for commercial sexual exploitation.
Palestinian Education System

[SIR CHRISTOPHER CHOPE in the Chair]

4 pm

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (Lab): I beg to move, That this House has considered incitement in the Palestinian education system.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher.

The conflict between Israel and the Palestinians provokes strong passions and much disagreement on all sides of the debate. Wherever we stand, I hope we can all agree that to bring that tragic conflict to a close, it is vital that old hatreds and prejudices are not passed on to new generations of children and young people. That is why I requested this debate.

I unreservedly support a two-state solution and I believe that a strong and competent Palestinian Authority have an important part to play in achieving that goal.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I am sorry to interrupt the right hon. Lady just after she has started, but she made an excellent point. Has she noticed, as I have, that textbooks for Palestinian children contain the phrase that cities in Israel such as Tel Aviv are in occupied Palestine? That goes completely against the two-state solution.

Joan Ryan: I cannot but agree with the hon. Gentleman. There are some terrible examples of what appears in the textbooks, which I will come to shortly.

Given Britain’s long-standing advocacy of the two-state solution, I believe it is appropriate for us to provide aid to the Palestinian Authority, but as is recognised in the memorandum of understanding between the Department for International Development and the PA, and the partnership principles that underpin it, British aid is not a blank cheque. Crucially, it demands that the PA adhere to the principles of non-violence and respect for human rights, and requires DFID to take action when they do not.

Dame Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Is my right hon. Friend concerned that the textbooks she talks about call on children to “annihilate the remnants of the foreigners”, as well as talking about sacrificing blood? They call on young children to believe that “death is a privilege”. Does she believe that that kind of teaching to very young children is compatible with seeking co-existence?

Joan Ryan: I do not believe it is compatible with seeking co-existence; to warp the minds of young children is a serious form of child abuse.

Ian Austin (Dudley North) (Lab): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Joan Ryan: For the last time, I think, yes I will.

Ian Austin: We find extremists and people who foster hatred in all communities on all sides of all conflicts. What worries me about this is that some of the material is in books that are officially sanctioned by the Palestinian Authority. Is the answer not to use more of Britain’s aid budget to promote projects that bring young people together, such as the Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow project that I have visited in Jerusalem, where young Israelis and young Palestinians work together, co-operate and discuss the issues? Is that not a building block for the peace process that we all want to see?

Joan Ryan: My hon. Friend is right. There is no question that co-existence projects work. They are crucial in building that constituency for peace and in demonstrating that Palestinians and Israelis can live alongside each other.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab) rose—

Joan Ryan: I will give way one more time, to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon). That is going to be it.

Jim Shannon: I congratulate the right hon. Lady on bringing this debate forward. Does she agree that texts for a science class phrased as has been described can do nothing other than teach hatred? Does she agree that we should use all the diplomatic pressure available to press for textbooks that teach facts and methods, not hatred and rage?

Joan Ryan: Absolutely. It is completely indefensible that officially sanctioned textbooks used in school and sanctioned by the Palestinian Authority contain material that is really harmful to children. It certainly does not bode well for building peace.

Richard Burden: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Joan Ryan: I will make a little bit of progress and will come back to my hon. Friend—I do not want to leave out the last person who wants to intervene.

There are many instances where the PA have clearly and repeatedly flouted the principles I referred to. Perhaps most egregious is its payment of salaries to those who commit terrorist attacks—a truly grotesque policy that further incentivises violence by rewarding those who are serving the longest sentences, and thus have committed the most heinous acts, with the highest payments. The official PA media are also saturated with vile anti-Semitism and the glorification of those who commit acts of violence against Jews.

I fail, for instance, to see how children’s television programmes in which poems are recited that refer to Jews as “barbaric monkeys”, “wretched pigs” and the “most evil among creations” do anything to advance the cause of peace, reconciliation and co-existence. Neither do I view the naming of summer camps and sports tournaments after so-called martyrs who murder Israeli schoolchildren as in any way conducive to furthering a two-state solution.

I confine my remarks today, however, to the question of incitement in the Palestinian education system in general and the new PA school curriculum in particular. In 2016 and 2017, the PA published a reformed curriculum covering both primary and secondary school students.
It represented the most substantial revision of the curriculum since the establishment of the PA in the wake of the Oslo accords. As the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education outlined in a series of reports, the new curriculum represents a significant step backwards. Based on standards for peace and tolerance derived from UNESCO and UN declarations, it found that the new curriculum “exerts pressure over young Palestinians to acts of violence in a more extensive and sophisticated manner” and has expanded its focus “from demonization of Israel to providing a rationale for war.”

It is “more radical than ever, purposefully and strategically encouraging Palestinian children to sacrifice themselves to martyrdom.”

The incitement is pernicious and pervades subjects across the curriculum and across every age group. Children of 13 are taught Newton’s second law through the image of a boy with a slingshot targeting soldiers. For the avoidance of any doubt, I have here the textbook and can show hon. Members the relevant photograph. The evidence is not difficult to come across. Children of 10 are asked to calculate the number of martyrs in Palestinian uprisings in a maths textbook, and I have that here too.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. I would advise the right hon. Lady that it is not possible to use exhibits. Apart from anything else, how is that to be advised the right hon. Lady that it is not possible to use exhibits.

Joan Ryan: Thank you for your guidance, Sir Christopher. I shall abide by it.

Children of 11 are told that martyrdom and jihad are the “most important meanings of life”.

They are taught that “drinking the cup of bitterness with glory is much sweeter than a pleasant long life accompanied by humiliation”.

To ram home that terrible lesson, martyrs such as Dalal Mughrabi—who led the infamous 1978 coastal road massacre in which 38 Israelis, including 13 children, were brutally murdered—are held up as role models.

To make that point even more plain, given that a new set of school textbooks will be distributed in September, the Government’s review risks being out of date by the time it is completed. The big reforms introduced last year mean that those books are likely to contain very few changes. However, that will still allow the PA to argue that there are new books—

Richard Burden: I thank my right hon. Friend for her generosity in giving way once again.

“Building a house is like killing 100 Arabs. Building a whole settlement is like killing 10,000 non-Jews.”

Those are the words of settler leader Moshe Zar, not at an unofficial gathering but at an official Israeli Ministry of Education event, and reported in Ynetnews. Does the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel), stated in correspondence with me last year:

“The MOU... includes a commitment from the PA to take action against incitement to violence, including addressing allegations of incitement in the education curriculum.”

I first brought the new curriculum to Ministers’ attention last September. With my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin), who is here today, and my hon. Friend the Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), I wrote to the International Development Secretary and the Prime Minister, whose intolerance of extremism does not appear to extend to her own Government's expenditure. Since then, the Government have blustered, prevaricated and delayed. They first dismissed the objectivity of the IMPACT-se report. Then they claimed that IMPACT-se was, in part, basing its view of the curriculum on a report published three years before the new curriculum was introduced. Seven months on, they announced that they would conduct their own independent assessment of the Palestinian curriculum. The net result is that Palestinian children have been served up this diet of hate for another year.

Given that a new set of school textbooks will be distributed in September, the Government’s review risks being out of date by the time it is completed. The big reforms introduced last year mean that those books are likely to contain very few changes. However, that will still allow the PA to argue that there are new books—
a tactic they have successfully deployed with international donors in the past. I simply cannot understand why Ministers have been so slow and reluctant to confront the Palestinian Authority. We could and should have prevented this by saying, “No,” and stopping the cheques. It really was not a hard call.

In the time the Government have been stalling, the European Union has passed legislation requiring that all teaching and training programmes financed through EU funds, such as PEGASE, must reflect common values such as peace, freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination within education. The legislation “asks the Commission to ensure that European funds are spent in line with Unesco-derived standards of peace and tolerance in education”.

Once again, I urge the Government to take action. First, they should suspend all aid to the PA that directly or indirectly finances those teaching and implementing this curriculum until the PA commit to wholesale and urgent revisions of it. Secondly, I have suggested previously that Britain cut its aid to the PA by 14%—double the percentage of the PA budget that is used to pay terrorist salaries—and invest that money in a Palestinian peace fund aimed at young people. It would support education projects in Palestine not tarnished by the PA’s anti-Semitism. While money that would have paid the salaries of teachers and Education Ministry public servants remains suspended, it can be redirected into that fund. I am suggesting not a cut in the funding but a change in where it goes. Palestinian children and young people must not suffer due to the acts of their leaders.

Finally, given that the UK is so heavily invested in education, we must ensure that we monitor far more closely what is going on in Palestinian classrooms. I urge that, in keeping with new legislation being considered by the United States, the Secretary of State for International Development be required to issue a written statement to the International Development Committee each year to confirm that she is satisfied that the content in the PA curriculum does not encourage or incite violence, that it conforms with standards for peace and tolerance derived from the UNESCO declarations, and that no UK aid is being used directly or indirectly to fund educational materials that do not meet those standards.

I recognise that the Government have decided to conduct their own review, so I request that the Minister addresses the following questions in his response. In their correspondence with me, the Minister and the Prime Minister have emphasised that the Government regularly engage with the PA on issues of incitement. First, will the Minister give us two or three concrete examples of action taken by the PA, as a result of that engagement, to curb incitement? Secondly, will he tell us when the DFID review will be completed? Will he agree to place a copy of it in the Library of the House?

Thirdly, will the Minister confirm that, as IMPACT-se did, the DFID review will examine every page of every PA textbook through the prism of defined methodologies? I have a list of 133 textbooks, which I am happy to furnish him with. When the review is completed, will he place in the Library a list of all the textbooks that DFID officials examined? Fourthly, will he confirm that the DFID review is being given access to the full curriculum?

Fifthly, I know the Minister will wish to ensure that the DFID review is stringent, robust and evidence-based. Will he therefore confirm that DFID’s methodologies, like those deployed by IMPACT-se, make reference to or are in accordance with articles 1, 4.2 and 5 of the declaration of the principles on tolerance proclaimed and signed by the member states of UNESCO on 16 November 1995; principles 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the UN declaration on the promotion among youth of the ideals of peace, mutual respect and understanding between peoples, signed in 1965; and articles 9 and 18 of the integrated framework for action on education for peace, human rights and democracy, approved by the general conference of UNESCO at its 28th session in Paris in November 1995? Finally, will the Minister undertake to place in the Library of the House a copy of the research methodologies that DFID’s review is utilising?

It is highly regrettable that the Government have effectively made British taxpayers complicit in the delivery of this curriculum of hate. We must stop funding this incitement to violence and terror; we must cease subsidising this abuse of Palestinian children and young people; and we must do so before young minds are poisoned, thus perpetuating a tragic conflict that has gone on for far too long.

4.19 pm

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, as always.

I thank the right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) for securing the debate. I shall not be able to answer all her questions this afternoon. The time I had available to prepare was cut short because earlier in the main Chamber I had to deal with an urgent question about the demolition of Khan al-Ahmarr. Some Members present were there for that, but not everyone. I am afraid that it ate into my time, so I have not been able to do as much preparation as I would have liked. None the less, I am grateful to her for raising a subject that is, across the House, of considerable interest and concern, which is shared by me and all Ministers.

The UK strongly condemns all forms of violence and incitement on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We continue to urge the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to avoid engaging in or encouraging any type of action and language that makes a culture of peaceful co-existence and a negotiated solution to the conflict more difficult to achieve. Nowhere are the values of peace and tolerance more important than in education.

It was perfectly right and proper for the right hon. Lady to cite a series of examples. None of them was justifiable, and the United Kingdom would not seek to justify them in any way, but we have discussed such matters too many times in this place, and too many attitudes are born out of the conflict’s history and context, making them difficult to escape. None the less, if a future generation is to have the opportunities that we want for it, that will have to start in schools—all the schools, and all the teaching of those who go to school. As I mentioned earlier, one of my concerns is that over time the distance between young people and others, between Israelis and Palestinians, becomes greater, because of the length of time the conflict has gone on and because of a hardening of attitudes on all sides. We have to start with that, but we have to see what we can do about such an important issue.

In May, in Ramallah, I raised incitement with the Palestinian Education Minister in a meeting about the UK’s future support to the Palestinian Authority. To give
the right hon. Lady the concrete example she is looking for. I sat across a desk from the Education Minister and asked him about incitement in textbooks. We talked about what to do and he answered me. It is that direct—straightforwardly, with a colleague. I shall move on to what we will do in a moment, but British officials hold similar conversations with other Palestinian counterparts, so it is done and it is done directly. The Education Minister welcomed the prospect of an independent international review of Palestinian textbooks and assured me that the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education would take seriously the findings of any such review. I shall move on to that in more detail in a moment.

The UK is a long-term supporter of Palestinian education. Last year UK aid helped up to 24,000 Palestinian children in the west bank go to school. I saw for myself the positive impact of our money on the lives of just a few of those boys and girls during my recent visit. The children I met at an elementary school in Ramallah showed me with pride their school garden and artwork, and told me about their hopes and aspirations for the future—to be doctors, engineers and teachers. They need our help to have a fair chance of making those dreams a reality. They are the peace-builders of tomorrow, and that is why it is vital that the UK and other international partners support them.

Our continued support will come with a continued strong challenge to the Palestinian Authority on education sector incitement. Let me be very clear: education has no place for materials or practices that incite young minds towards violence. I have seen the reports expressing concern about the content of new Palestinian textbooks, and I take the findings of those reports seriously. Our response must be rigorous, evidence-based and made in the company of other international supporters of the Palestinian education system, in order to ensure that the Palestinian Authority hear a strong, credible and unified voice about what must be done so that their textbooks support peace and do not incite violence.

That is why we are in the final stages of discussions to establish an independent textbook review jointly with other donors. The plan at the moment is for the review to be completed by September 2019. Department for International Development officials have begun preparation for that independent review. It will be evidence-based and rigorous, to ensure that the Palestinian Authority hear that strong, credible voice. In the interim, we shall continue to express concern about incitement with the PA.

A specific concern was the new pilot textbooks, which is why they are the most appropriate focus for analysis and our immediate work with the PA. Separately, we are interested in the role that education can play in promoting tolerance and inclusion. We shall, accordingly, look at other aspects of the education system, including the broader curriculum.

Why are we seeking a joint review instead of doing it ourselves? We think that joining up with other donors will provide a rigorous analysis of Palestinian textbooks and a unified voice from the international community about what the PA need to do. That will also deliver value for money and avoid the risk of two different analyses from competing authorities.

I did have one concern when the right hon. Lady mentioned the review. She suggested that in some quarters the review of the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education was disregarded, but I too was concerned at some of the findings. The Department has met IMPACT-se to investigate further, but we thought that an objective review was also necessary. It is right to have done that.

In answer to the hon. Member for Dudley North (Ian Austin) on co-existence, as I think the House knows, I value such projects very much. Some are proceeding at the moment with £3 million in support, but we might have more in future. I have listened to positive portrayals of the UK, the hon. Lady, the hon. Gentleman and indeed the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) on that, because if such co-existence projects are to work, they must come with support from all sides. There is more that we can do, and that is important.

Our ambition for inclusive education must be much greater than simply to ensure that textbooks do not incite violence. To contribute towards a just and lasting peace, we must promote positive portrayals of others to instil the values of peace and tolerance in the minds of young people. That is why the UK will continue to seek ways of ensuring that our current and future support for education brings young people together to build confidence, trust and understanding across communities.

To conclude, I reiterate that the UK condemns incitement in all its forms. I shall continue to raise the issue directly with the leadership of the Palestinian Authority, both during and upon conclusion of the textbook review. I shall also continue to encourage positive portrayals of others on both sides of the conflict, because that is vital to deliver a two-state solution that will lead to a just and lasting peace.

To repeat one or two of the things that I said in the earlier debate, a lasting and just peace is based not only on words but on actions. Actions that are detrimental to a two-state solution and look likely to make it more difficult will be condemned by the United Kingdom Government—we do make such condemnations, such that of the demolition of Khan al-Ahmar, which started earlier today. On both sides of the conflict, things are done that make peace more difficult. Incitement is wrong and should not be any part of the situation. Each party to the conflict, whether Hamas pushing people towards the fence to be killed or those involved in actions likely to make a two-state solution more difficult, bears responsibility for the peace we need in the future.

This House is clear in its determination that a two-state solution is the only viable future. We have to continue to be clear and determined about that. We have to ensure that those we talk to know that we mean it seriously. Removing incitement will play a key part, and it cannot be ignored by those who may think that the experience of occupation is so severe that in some places it can be condoned. No, incitement cannot and will not be condoned. We will be clear about speaking out on everything that gives rise to the perpetuation of a conflict that, as the right hon. Lady concluded, has gone on for far too long.

Question put and agreed to.
Five-year Land Supply

4.29 pm

James Cartlidge (South Suffolk) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered the five-year land supply.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher, and to have been selected to introduce this important debate. I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister. It is great to see so many colleagues here—their presence underlines the importance of this issue.

The phrase “five-year land supply” sounds innocuous, but it cuts through to one of the most critical parts of the planning system. We all know the national picture. There is consensus that we need to build more homes because of the crisis of home ownership and the fact that housing is very expensive in large parts of the country. Those houses have to be built somewhere. There is often tension in communities about where properties should go, so we rely on our planning system to come to fair decisions about how sites are allocated and developed. I fully accept that the Government require a method for measuring the extent to which councils deliver those homes, but the five-year land supply system—although it is understandable in the way it is set out—is fundamentally flawed. Rather than encouraging the delivery of homes, it encourages speculative development. That is true not only in my constituency; a number of colleagues have spoken to me about it.

Let us understand why the situation arises. If the council or planning authority in question does not have a five-year land supply, rather than local policy taking priority when planning applications are considered, the national planning policy framework becomes the priority. Neighbourhood plans fall away and local policies become far less important.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): Let me correct my hon. Friend. Neighbourhood plans do not fall away. The law was changed, under ministerial guidance, to bring the five-year land supply down to three years where there is a neighbourhood plan that allocates sites and is two years old. My constituents have made a lot of that important concession.

James Cartlidge: I know that my hon. Friend was influential in neighbourhood plans. I was going to make that point, which is certainly true, so that was not so much a correction as a preview. I always say to my colleagues, “If you’re going to do a neighbourhood plan, allocate sites, because it will still be relevant if there is only a three-year land supply.” That incredibly important development was confirmed by Gavin Barwell when he was Housing Minister.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I fully support my hon. Friend. In Wokingham we have 11,000 outstanding planning permissions and a required build rate of 900 a year. People might therefore think that we had a 12-year land supply, but until recently the Government said that we had less than a five-year supply. They do not want to endorse our decision, which makes a lot of sense, to have four major sites with infrastructure and other support.

James Cartlidge: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. That chimes with the situation in my area and many others, as I have heard from colleagues. I will come back to that point.

To understand why the system leads to speculative development, it is important to understand that when I say local policy becomes less important in the absence of a five-year land supply, I basically mean that it becomes far easier for a developer to get an application through on appeal. That is the nub of the issue. The district may still reject the application, but the point is that a developer with savvy lawyers and all the rest of it can game the system and get their application through on appeal. When it goes to appeal, the local community and local democracy have almost no say and the system becomes unaccountable. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about that.

One might say, “Hold on a minute, we want to build more homes. Isn’t that the way we should be doing things?” Let me use as an example the district of Babergh, which is entirely within my constituency. Babergh has been charged with providing 7,820 homes over the next 20 years. It has already granted unbuilt permissions for almost 5,000, so almost two thirds of 20 years’ worth of permissions have already been granted, yet we are seen as not having a five-year housing supply. That is extraordinary.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): The irony is that that land is sitting on balance sheets rather than being delivered. That precludes smaller builders and developers from taking on sites. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to find a way to resolve that and allow some of our smaller builders to deliver?

James Cartlidge: I know that my hon. Friend is passionate about that issue and has come up with some radical suggestions in that regard.

The experience in Babergh is common around the country, and it underlines my main point. It sounds good in principle to say to councils, “Nimby councils will be held to account—you must deliver the homes,” but they are doing the right thing. They are granting permissions—in fact, they are granting way more than they are meant to—and going through the pain of taking controversial decisions in planning committees and so on, but sites are not being built out.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I led a debate on this issue earlier this year, which my hon. Friend supported. Does he agree that although we must get the detail right, there is also a question of principle? Through the Localism Act 2011, we set out to be the party that, when in government, gave local communities the chance to shape their future. We are now in danger of looking like we are in favour of speculators, profiteers and out-of-town developers, who dump housing estates that we legislate for, with no responsibility being taken locally. That is not what our party should be about.

James Cartlidge: That is an excellent point. The key word, which we will hear a lot in the coming days, is “control.” We call it speculative development because the community loses control. Let us be honest: if an area has a five-year land supply, there will still be controversial planning applications, but those will be
determined by the local authority. People will be unhappy about homes being built in—this is a terrible phrase—their backyard, but the point is that the local community will have a say; it will have control.

Colleagues know what speculative applications are like. They come forward, often from a new breed of company called the promoter of a development, rather than from a builder. Those companies work the system to their advantage, putting out brochures that often boast, “Your local district doesn’t have a five-year land supply.” We get extraordinarily unpopular applications that get people marching down our streets, yet we find there is nothing we can do about them. It is not like councils are not doing the right thing; they are giving out thousands of planning permissions.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As he rightly says, there is a need for local councils to deliver housing where that is appropriate. Mid Suffolk and Babergh failed for a number of years to address housing provision. Only under new leadership, with a new chief executive, did they take the issue forward and look at developing a local plan, underneath which neighbourhood plans will sit. What does he say to those councils, and how can we make councils look at their local housing need and deliver homes for people who need them?

James Cartlidge: That is a perfectly fair point. Many councils will have been seen as recalcitrant in the past. My point is about build-out rates. The councils I am talking about are delivering permissions; the issue is the build-out rate. No one disputes that. The Government themselves appointed my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) to review the delivery of permissions, and I very much welcome that.

I am not going to speak for much longer, because colleagues wish to contribute and I think we will be interrupted by Divisions. I have a simple ask. The Government are looking at what measures to bring in to compel, incentivise or encourage development, so that permissions become properties in which people can live. While those powers are not at hand, there should be a transition period during which councils are assessed purely on the number of permissions they grant. If councils do not have the power to compel development, how can we punish them for sites with permission not being built out? That is the core of my ask.

What effect would that have? What would happen if we said tomorrow, “Councils will now be measured purely on the number of permissions they grant rather than on the build-out rate”? The answer is simple: builders would have to build out the sites for which they had been granted permission—hey presto! That is surely how the system should work. The Government clearly do not want this to happen, but as many as 60, 70 or 80 councils do not have a five-year land supply, which means that, rather than more delivery, they get speculative applications that undermine consent for the planning system.

What does this issue boil down to? It is about having sustainable development rather than speculative development. Sustainable development does not mean that everyone welcomes development in their backyard and is excited about 150 new houses being built in their village or market town, but it at least means that they trust the system is legitimate and give it their consent. That is being squeezed out by the five-year land supply system. I simply say to the Minister that he should listen to me and to colleagues when we say that we need to look seriously at reforming this area.
did so and have ended up with a Gladman-led development forced through against their wishes. That destroys rather than enhances public trust in planning.

Dr Drew: We actually beat Gladman in my constituency, so there is at least one aspect where we are slightly different, but the reality is exactly that. It is most difficult to persuade parish councils that they can do more when they have seen their neighbouring parishes turned over big time.

There is a generic problem, so I appeal to the Minister to look at the process—and in particular at Stroud district, because we have a specific problem with our increase. We will never build anything like the numbers of houses we want unless we solve that quickly. We need clarity so that people know that what is promised will be delivered. Dare I say that we could get rid of some of these extant sites? If the developers do not want to use them, they should lose them. We will find other people who will come and build on them appropriately, and then we will begin to deal with our housing problems.

4.43 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): The last time I was in this Chamber, I had cause to warn the rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Joseph Johnson), that in Sussex we have a habit of burning an effigy of people who have particularly irritated us. At the moment, those who run Gova Thameslink Railway are at the top of that list, but running a very close second are those responsible for undermining the neighbourhood planning policy, which should be heralded as such a great success for this Government. It was the policy by which power was to be returned to local people, who were to have control over where development went. Decisions taken in neighbourhood plans are entered into by the whole community, having been drawn up by volunteers and then voted on by that community in local referendums. Just as we are now debating nationally the importance of honouring a referendum result, so it gravely undermines democracy locally when decisions taken by local communities can be so easily overridden. I am afraid that is exactly what is happening.

I very much welcome my hon. Friend the Minister to his place. I hope that he will take this message back to his Department. This is like groundhog day: we have had this debate endlessly in this Chamber and on the Floor of the House, and we are constantly told, “Yes, the Government understand the problem and will do something about it.” Indeed, in December 2016 Gavin Barwell, then the excellent Housing Minister and now the Prime Minister’s excellent chief of staff, introduced helpful new guidance precisely designed to deal with the problem, ensuring that neighbourhood plans would be respected and that speculative developers could not win in the way my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) has ably described. The problem with that guidance is that it can apply only to neighbourhood plans made up to two years before the date of that guidance, and if local authorities did not have a three-year land supply it did not work at all.

Subsequent to the introduction of those new measures, I have had at least two decisions taken right up to the Planning Inspectorate or the Secretary of State and then lost on appeal because that guidance could not be used. It offered no protection to the local community on those technicalities and the speculative developers won. It is important to underline my hon. Friend’s point: that is not the way to increase house building in this country. We stand united in our desire to increase housing supply, which is a political, economic and social imperative. Everybody gets that, but the whole point is that neighbourhood plans delivered significantly more housing than was anticipated and, best of all, they did it with local consent.

Local communities were brought together and told that they would be given power. They were asked to accept responsibility and they did so, taking difficult decisions, sometimes in the face of strong local opposition, and agreed that development should go in certain places while other places should be protected. Those communities worked on the assumption that what they had been told was true, so those areas were to be protected for the 15-year life of the plan. However, almost within months they see that meant absolutely nothing: the developers could simply charge in.

Worse, those communities were given promises by their local Member of Parliament that everything would be made better by the new guidance, from December 2016, which the Campaign to Protect Rural England, I and hon. Friends who worked on it all said would help. No doubt it has helped in some circumstances, but by no means all, as I indicated. What happens then is support for neighbourhood plans collapses. In West Sussex, I now find it difficult to persuade communities that have not done neighbourhood plans to enter into them. They say, “Look at what happened in the neighbouring village. They went through this process, which costs a lot of money and costs the volunteers a lot of grief. Is it really worth it? The developers come in and simply overrode the plans anyway.”

George Freeman: My right hon. Friend is putting a powerful point to the Minister about the undermining of trust in the system. Does he agree that something else is going on? Where, in my case, the district council agreed to put housing in the right place, down by the main road—the A11 in this case—the developers are banking those permissions for later, because they know that they will get them, and using the five-year land supply to force the wrong development in the wrong places. Not only is trust in the system undermined, but we are getting the wrong development in the wrong places, which is deeply undermining people’s ability to say yes to new housing. It is compounding the problem.

Nick Herbert: My hon. Friend puts it incredibly well, and I strongly agree. That is why this is so cynical. We have to understand that developers are not just taking advantage of a loophole but gaming the system. As a consequence, I believe we are building fewer houses than we could if developers had to do what policy should require and deliver. I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) has been charged with looking at this, and that is important, but there are changes we could make in the meantime, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk has suggested.

I will make two final points to the Minister. First, the Government are incorporating the guidance they issued in December 2016 into the new national policy framework. Could they look again at the threshold for the three-year
land supply and the longevity of the test? Under both those things, the suitability of this as a remedy is being lost. It is not as effective as it should be. Could the Government also look at the wording they are using to incorporate it? It defines “recently brought into force”

neighbourhood plans as meaning

“a neighbourhood plan which was passed at referendum two years or less before the date on which the decision is made.”

That is leading some to believe that neighbourhood plans simply fall after two years, which I am sure is not what the Government mean. It would be helpful to clarify that they do not mean that.

Secondly, and more important, our policy needs to change and we need to move away from five-year land supplies to delivery as the test. That is the fundamental change that needs to be made if we want to build houses and we wish to do so with public consent. I suggest that is the better way to do it.

4.51 pm

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I will say first of all that I am fully aware of companies such as Gladman gaming the system. Gladman did exactly the same in my constituency, and I am pleased to say that on one occasion we managed to fight it off and turn it down. The question that my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) asked initially was how many councils there are without a five-year land supply.

When I have asked that question of the Department, the answer that has come back is that they do not know—they do not collect the information in that format; they do not collect that information at all. My first request is that they start collecting that information, because without it the whole system has a gap in it. What makes that important is that we have changed the way we calculate the housing need for communities. It has been brought down to a much more robust formula, which is having a big effect on communities. This is a suitable opportunity to address the issue full time.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk already mentioned the three-year housing land supply, which is important to bear in mind. I have also asked that it be given permanence and that the arguments that have been made about whether it lasts for two years and whether renewed neighbourhood plans have it for an extra two years be settled. The assurance I have been given is that that is being looked at.

4.53 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

5.23 pm

On resuming—

John Howell: It is very rare for me to be cut off in the middle of a sentence, so allow me to sum up where I was before the Division bell rang. In relation to the consultation on the national planning policy framework, I have had conversations with members of the Department about the three-year housing land supply figure. The Department is looking at whether that should be permanent, or, if not, how long it should apply for.

The other change that I have called for as part of my work with the local plan expert group is to ensure that we do not continue to lose the millions of pounds that are lost each year through councils having to go to law to defend their five-year land supply. I have suggested that the five-year land supply becomes part of the council’s annual report, and that once it is in there it is not challengeable in the courts for that year. That gives the council a year’s breathing space each year, once the figure is agreed. As for the calculation of the land supply, I am perfectly open to whether it is based on planning permissions or delivery. I can see the logic for it being a calculation based on delivery.

Members have spoken about how neighbourhood plans are delivering about 10% more houses than were predicted. That is actually quite a lot of new houses. There are something like 2,500 communities across the country that are going through or have been through the process of producing a neighbourhood plan. The results of the referendums have been North Korean in style, as was witnessed in the village in which I live, where the approval rate in the referendum was something over 90%. I think that is a great triumph for everyone who was involved in it.

I remain positive about neighbourhood plans. I have been around the country speaking to those involved in them, and if hon. Members want somebody to come and talk about neighbourhood plans, that is the job that I have, and I am happy to do that for any hon. Member who asks me to do so.

James Cartlidge: On a point of order, Sir Christopher. In the great excitement of commencing my speech, I failed to draw the House’s attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): That is noted; thank you.

Several hon. Members rose—

Sir Christopher Chope (in the Chair): Order. To inform hon. Members of the timings, we will now finish at 6.30 pm, which means that we will start the wind-ups at 5.53 pm. That means that there is time, between now and 5.53 pm, for the four hon. Members who seek to catch my eye.

5.27 pm

Alec Shelbrooke (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): The simple truth is that our constituents, the public, have no faith left in the planning system. That is hardly a surprise when one is dealing with, to be frank, the rank incompetence of a council such as Leeds City Council. It has created a totally over-inflated housing target figure, which even the academics at Leeds University have claimed simply could not be built in the timeframe laid out, yet in the next couple of weeks we are to go into a public inquiry in which we assess whether Leeds City Council’s site allocations plan is sound. How can something be sound if it is based on fantasy figures?

Leeds City Council has lost almost every single Planning Advisory Service appeal; every time, the PAS says, “You don’t have a five-year land supply.” But the figure is being inflated to say that we need tens of thousands more houses than we actually need. It is, therefore, very difficult to come up with the land supply for houses that are never going to be built.
What are the consequences of that? Sites are being put forward to be built on that should never have been involved. They are the prime sites, where a developer will start building on the site and get their housing numbers up.” They quite legitimately do not have to build on the brownfield sites, because the council has said, “This is a site you can build on.” The developer then starts to build on that green-belt and greenfield site, and they get far more revenue from that. There is no incentive for them to move elsewhere.

In the past five years, Leeds City Council has granted 25,148 planning permissions. Of those, 4,429 expired—they were not built within the specified timeframe—and only 3,680 were built. Therefore 17,039 remain unbuilt, yet Leeds says that we need to find planning and space for another 70,000 houses.

I realise that the Minister cannot respond to this, but his constituency neighbours mine, and the councils in his constituency, especially Harrogate Borough Council, are planning to build tens of thousands of houses on the border of my constituency. At the moment, Leeds City Council is not taking any notice of that, and it is saying that we need to expand. Councillor Alan Lamb from Wetherby, Councillor Ryan Stephenson from Harewood, and Councillor Matthew Robinson have been at the forefront of fighting back against Leeds City Council, but it is a Labour majority council by quite some margin. Even the independents—I pay tribute to Councillor Mark Dobson, who is an independent in Garforth in my constituency—have been fighting against the Labour council on those numbers, but they just get ridden roughshod over.

On 1 August, I will be at a site allocations plan inquiry arguing why a grade II listed parks and gardens site should not be built on. I will be doing that because Leeds City Council refuses to reassess the numbers it came up with on the basis of totally out-of-date migration figures from the early and mid-2000s, when numbers were much higher than they are now. Even now, demand is declining, although the council says that it is going up. The inspector has said, “It is not my job to assess the numbers. That was done in 2012. We are here to judge the soundness of the SAP.” How can we possibly judge the soundness of the plan when we are dealing with fantasy numbers?

We have lost every PAS site appeal in my constituency. The only one left is Scholes. The plan to try to save that PAS site and build somewhere else on the Parlington estate would increase the traffic flow through that village by 300%—that is Leeds City Council’s highways department’s own figure. Even the solutions that Leeds City Council came up with to try to save a village actually destroy that village by shifting the problem elsewhere.

I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge), and I congratulate him on securing this debate. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert). It has to be about how many houses we build, not how many permissions we have. Quite simply, in my constituency alone, almost 75% of the planning permissions have gone unbuilt. How on earth can someone put forward a plan that says: “Actually, Elmet and Rothwell needs another 12,000 houses,” when 75% of the permissions granted have not yet been built? The whole thing needs to be reassessed.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to feed back to his Department that, unless the numbers are accurate, these processes are completely unsound. All we are doing is giving a licence to build on the green belt and greenfield land, rather than tackling brownfield land, which consequently means there is no affordable housing.

5.32 pm

Lee Rowley (North East Derbyshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) on securing the debate. The problem is countrywide and it affects North East Derbyshire. At times, this debate has seemed like a self-help group where we all put our concerns and difficulties on the table.

We are experiencing similar difficulties in my constituency, because a council has abjectly failed to discharge its responsibilities over several years—more than a decade. Just as my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) described, that will bring about a plan loaded with too high a number of houses to be built in my part of the world. At the same time, because the five-year housing land supply has only just been put in place, it has caused a significant number of speculative planning developments to be submitted in places that are inappropriate under the plan and objectively inappropriate for people who live in the area and know it best.

Over the past couple of years, North East Derbyshire has experienced 11 separate planning applications in areas that the local plan would not allow to be developed under any other circumstances. Those applications are for more than 1,300 homes. Given that our district has to build only 6,600 homes over a 15 to 20-year timeframe, 1,300 homes that should not have been applied for in the first place represent a significant increase in the number of houses that are needed. The area in the bottom half of my constituency is already slated to take 3,000 new houses that local residents have accepted and, in some ways, embraced, so this is not about nimbyism. It is about houses being built in the wrong place because councils are failing to put in place the right plans and failing to discharge their responsibilities. As a result, we are seeing the loss of greenfield sites and other places where houses would otherwise be considered completely inappropriate.

I draw hon. Members’ attention to two problems with the five-year housing land supply. The first is methodology. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell made the point about over-inflated numbers. In the same way, my district council did not get the target figure of 280 houses a year right in the first place, and it is now about to replace that with a figure of 323 houses a year, which will further undermine local residents’ confidence that our planning system knows what it is doing.

Despite not having the correct top-line figure, when the council assesses the deliverability of the planning permissions that have been put in place, it talks to the developers themselves, so the developers get a second opportunity to say whether they will build in places where they already have planning permission. That methodology retards the overall five-year housing land supply and gives developers more opportunity to get housing planning permissions through. That methodology is a huge problem.
The second problem is competence. The political leadership in my local council has been thoroughly incompetent in ensuring that North East Derbyshire is protected from inappropriate and speculative housing developments. The authority monitoring report, which my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) outlined to some extent, is a publication that appears and disappears at will. The 2014 version appeared a year late—a full year after the council decided it had a 2.15-year housing land supply. The 2015 version did not even appear, and was just amalgamated into a 2015 and 2016 report. Again, that appeared nine months after the number was calculated.

We did not know what our housing land supply was until a special report was taken to the council in October. I am pretty sure, because I spent some of last summer trying to calculate it, that the council knew many months beforehand that it had hit the five-year housing land supply, but it chose not to report or announce it until October. When some planning applications went through, including one on Fanny Avenue, Killamarsh, it was stated that the absence of a five-year housing land supply was at least partly why they were approved.

My council is clearly completely failing, not just on the plan as a whole, but on the five-year housing land supply, and as a result I have to go and talk to residents in Wingerworth, Old Tupton, Ashover, Killamarsh and North Wingfield, where another 250 houses have just been put on a site that should not be developed on, and never has been, because the plan is not in place. That is unacceptable. I support the Government’s localism angle, and I accept that it works in principle, but when councils do not discharge their responsibilities, we reach the point that North East Derbyshire has got to. A huge number of houses are being built, potentially in the wrong places, and the only way to stop them is a huge amount of heartache and angst and huge numbers of planning inquiries.

Alec Shelbrooke: On the point about councils’ incompetence, Leeds City Council has been heard to say that it cannot discharge the responsibilities of reasessing the numbers. It has now moved to a position of saying, “We will assess the numbers after the site allocations plan.” If it reduces the numbers, it makes it even easier to build on the green belt and greenfield land.

Lee Rowley: My hon. Friend makes a correct and important point.

The only way that we can have any semblance of control over the planning system is by extraordinary displays of public opposition to applications that should never have gone through in the first place. Hundreds of hours of residents’ time are lost on many meetings that should not have to happen. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are allocated to planning inquiries that should never have started. All of that retards confidence in a planning system that is quite rightly trying to deliver the houses we need in this country for the long term. I understand that this is a challenging area, and hon. Members from both sides of the House have outlined why, but when councils do not discharge their responsibilities, we get to the place that North East Derbyshire has got to, which totally undermines the trust and belief that councils and the planning system can deliver.

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) on securing this important debate. I concur with everything he said—in the interests of brevity, I will not repeat his comments. I will use my contribution to give the example of Milton Keynes, our surrounding authorities and indeed the whole Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge arc, to show why there is an urgent need for much greater flexibility in the five-year supply requirements.

Milton Keynes has over 20,000 housing permissions granted, yet our build-out rate is such that we have recently been judged by the inspector as not having a five-year supply. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk and others have suggested, that is the open door for speculative development. It is ironic—large ones. It defies common sense that, if there is an inability to build out existing large developments, developers will have the resources, skills and raw materials to develop new large sites. It just defies logic.

In addition, and as my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) mentioned, there are neighbouring authorities to consider. Aylesbury Vale District Council, which is next door to Milton Keynes, is planning substantial new developments right on our boundary, which will be technically part of its authority but for all intents and purposes part of the urban footprint of Milton Keynes, using all our infrastructure and services without those being enhanced to take account of the additional population.

Within the whole Oxford-Cambridge corridor, for which I am the Government’s champion, there is a complete misalignment of timescales and objectives. The National Infrastructure Commission has an ambition for 1 million new homes—the Government are yet to publish their formal response to that. This is an area of the country where there is a need for new homes, and in many parts of it there is an appetite for new homes, works that are just scattered around the place randomly. They must be properly planned, they must be sympathetic to the existing urban and rural environment, and they must have proper infrastructure and public services.

Yet all the timescales are misaligned. Councils have to make short-term decisions on their housing allocations without knowledge of, for example, where the new Oxford-Cambridge expressway is going to be routed. That does not make sense. So there is an urgent need to realign these timescales, and to pause the current local plan and five-year supply timetables, so as to give a space in which to properly sequence all these decisions.

That is not to say that we do not need houses now; we absolutely do. Many areas in the Oxford-Cambridge corridor have an overheated property market, which is not just pricing people out of living there but is actually inhibiting economic growth, because employers cannot recruit the people they need, because the people they need cannot find a place to live that is affordable or suitably connected.

We have to find a way of accelerating the build-out rate of existing developments. As has been mentioned, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) will bring forward a range of solutions
to the problem, and I urge the Government to implement urgently what he proposes. That would give us the space, if the Government are willing to give some leeway on the target, to align properly all these decisions that have to be made. People have an appetite for development, but only if the houses are of good quality. We need to look not only at overall numbers, but at the types of housing that we build—social housing, houses for the elderly, and traditional, family-sized homes. Much more careful thought and planning needs to go into these long-term developments.

Development must be sympathetic to existing settlements and the rural environment. People will not just accept endless, soulless, identical housing estates being scattered across the countryside. However, we can use our knowledge and expertise in this country to build good-quality, attractive places that people will actively welcome, which will enhance existing settlements and provide the homes for future generations. That is within our gift, but we have to get away from our current rigid and inflexible system, which does not have public consent. Indeed, it is undermining the whole process of neighbourhood planning and local accountability.

Neil O’Brien: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and we are lucky to have with us here today one of the Members for Milton Keynes, because Milton Keynes shows us what proper, planned development can do; it can create nice places that lots of people want to live in.

My hon. Friend’s view that when there is the demand to build such huge numbers of homes, there should be a stand-alone community. However, the phrase “stand-alone” must mean stand-alone, and not a community that is dumped in a place, such as the Parlington estate in my constituency, which would have a massive effect on the villages around it? Development needs to be stand-alone.

The second thing we need to do is give councils greater discretion over how they spend the revenues they get from the community infrastructure levy and section 106 agreements. Although we capture more value than we did 10 years ago, once we take out the amount that is spent on social and affordable housing, less money is actually being spent now in real terms than 10 years ago on landscaping, community infrastructure and all the things that benefit existing residents. Therefore, let us give councils more discretion over the way they spend those revenues.

Finally, let us make sure that councils have the powers—be it through compulsory purchase order, or through their ability to buy and control land—to do what local councils in other countries in Europe, the US and Asia already do: provide a lead role in assembling and preparing land for development. That is the norm in most of the rest of the world; the UK is unusual in not having that arrangement. That is why a UK council cannot control the speed with which a developer builds out.

5.44 pm

Neil O’Brien (Harborough) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge) on securing this important debate and on his thoughtful speech.

Let me take a step back. Why is it that the centre of Government in the UK has felt the need over successive generations—from the planning by appeal of the 1980s, to the regional spatial strategies of the 1990s, to the five-year land supply—to have some vehicle to ensure that councils come up with local plans and that they deliver housing? Why is it that so many people oppose new housing in our country and so many councils oppose what developers come up with?

I think that there are two underlying reasons why people oppose so much new development. First, we build in the wrong places. Too much development is tacked on to the end of existing villages and towns, without the proper infrastructure—the new roads, parking spaces, GP surgeries and school places—that is necessary to support it. There is a terrible example of that in my own constituency on the Gartree Road, where the local Lib Dem-run council has decided to put in its own local plan a proposal for a large site on a road that is already congested, with the proposed houses being pushed right up against existing residents’ homes, when there is no need for that to be the case.

Secondly, there is no benefit or compensation for existing residents who are affected by new development. On Farndon Fields in my constituency, residents have to put up with construction traffic coming past their new homes, as well as dust and noise from the construction site, and there is no pay-off or compensation of any kind for them for putting up with all that.

How can we remedy these underlying reasons why so many of us oppose new development? The first thing we need to do is capture more of the benefits of development for the community. At the moment, only around a quarter of that huge uplift in value that we see when planning permission is granted is captured by the local community, with the overwhelming majority going to the lucky landowner and the developer. Other countries capture far more value from development for the community, which is then ploughed into decent landscaping, greater separation areas, more green space and better infrastructure for the community.

The second thing we need to do is give councils greater discretion over how they spend the revenues they get from the community infrastructure levy and section 106 agreements. Although we capture more value than we did 10 years ago, once we take out the amount that is spent on social and affordable housing, less money is actually being spent now in real terms than 10 years ago on landscaping, community infrastructure and all the things that benefit existing residents. Therefore, let us give councils more discretion over the way they spend those revenues.

Neil O’Brien: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and we are lucky to have with us here today one of the Members for Milton Keynes, because Milton Keynes shows us what proper, planned development can do; it can create nice places that lots of people want to live in.

I would like to see more of the development in this country happening in our cities. Changes such as the development of the modern knowledge-based economy mean that our cities are both where support for new development is highest and where the demand for new development is highest. Let us try to build more in our cities. Let us help inner-city councils build more, by liberalising building up, by giving them devolved powers
over public transport, and by giving them the powers to assemble land, in order to unlock fragmented brownfield sites, so that we can actually get more built in our cities. That is how we can have a new approach.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk is right to raise the issue of the five-year land supply. At the moment we have three tests on local councils: the requirement to have a local plan, the five-year land supply and the new delivery test that will be coming in over the coming year. Effectively, we have a belt and two braces. Of those three tests, the most opaque is the five-year land supply. It is extremely difficult for a council to know whether it has a five-year land supply, and it is extremely easy for developers to game that process and keep councils deliberately below the five-year land supply to stop them getting control over development in their area. It is the weakest of the three existing tests.

I end by agreeing strongly with my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk. He said, “It is perfectly reasonable to expect our councils to have a local plan, but how can we impose these tests on them without giving them the tools to control developers, development and where things happen?” The heartbreaking thing in many constituencies is where a council wants to do good development and build a real new community with proper infrastructure and a real heart, or the community has worked for two years to come up with a neighbourhood plan that works for the specific circumstances in that area, and developers come along, game the system and cut off at the knees our local elected representatives and the people who have worked hard to build neighbourhood plans. That is the killer in those situations. There is nothing more corrosive for public support for our current planning system than when we see councils that want to be brave and do good new development have their good plans cut off at the knees by developers gaming the system.

5.51 pm

Sarah Jones (Croydon Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir Christopher. It is also a pleasure to bring some gender balance to this debate. I counted 15 men and one woman when we started. I do not know what it is about planning that attracts men more than women, but we need to consider that, because this is such an important subject and it is vital for our communities. Why are there not more people here today?

I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Suffolk. He said, “It is perfectly reasonable to expect our councils to have a local plan, but how can we impose these tests on them without giving them the tools to control developers, development and where things happen?” The heartbreaking thing in many constituencies is where a council wants to do good development and build a real new community with proper infrastructure and a real heart, or the community has worked for two years to come up with a neighbourhood plan that works for the specific circumstances in that area, and developers come along, game the system and cut off at the knees our local elected representatives and the people who have worked hard to build neighbourhood plans. That is the killer in those situations. There is nothing more corrosive for public support for our current planning system than when we see councils that want to be brave and do good new development have their good plans cut off at the knees by developers gaming the system.

We agree on the problems, but we perhaps disagree on some of the solutions. We want more homes to be built—particularly affordable homes—but measuring councils on build-out rates rather than permissions will not necessarily help. As hon. Members said, if developers are gaming the system, do we not have to change the system? Should we not instead focus on giving councils the mechanisms to ensure that homes are built once planning permission is given, and to guarantee that affordable homes are part of that equation, which is a particular issue for the Opposition? That is one of the big problems with the proposed NPPF.

It is vital that, once local need for affordable housing has been properly assessed, mechanisms are in place to ensure that it is delivered. We would introduce a “use it or lose it” policy for permissioned but unbuilt sites and a new duty to deliver affordable homes, linked to a better measure of local need for affordable housing. We would establish an English sovereign land trust to work with local authorities to enable more proactive buying of land at a price closer to existing use value. As part of that, we would consider changing the rules governing the compensation paid to landowners.

We would introduce a presumption that there is no development without affordable housing, and a Labour Government would lift council housing borrowing caps...
to their prudential limits to kick-start the highest level of council house building in 30 years. Finally, we would remove the viability loophole that allows developers to dodge affordable housing obligations, and we would consider a range of wider reforms to overhaul the system.

I could say so much about quality, infrastructure, design and need, but we do not have time, so I conclude by saying that it is clear that we in this place and the wider population agree that we need more homes. I urge the Government, after eight years at the helm, to consider creating the climate and the local levers for that to happen.

5.57 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (Nigel Adams): It is a pleasure to serve under you, Sir Christopher, for the first time in this hot seat. It is also a great pleasure to have listened to some fantastic contributions from colleagues from across the House.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartlidge). Everyone who has contributed to the debate has been an outstanding champion for their local area. It was heartening to hear so many passionate speeches from right hon. and hon. Members.

Before I respond to some of the points made, I thank my hon. Friend for his continuing work to raise such important issues. He has great knowledge of the area and has spent many years of his professional life in the sector. I also read his well-informed “Red Box” piece in *The Times* today.

Many years before I was elected—before I had even considered going into politics—I asked the Member of Parliament for Selby at the time, the late Michael Alison, “What takes up most of your time?” He told me about the various issues, and I asked, “What about planning?” He said, “Planning is simple—I ignore it, don’t get involved in it and leave it to the council. That’s the way forward.” Times have changed a bit, because I think we can all agree that planning takes up an enormous amount of our time in this day and age.

I should point out that the Secretary of State, as Members know, has a quasi-judicial role in the planning system. I am sure everyone understands that it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the detail of individual decisions or plans, but I can talk about the issues that have been raised more broadly. I will set out our national policy aims and then speak more generally about the technical points of each case. I just need a steer on when I am meant to be finished by, following the 25-minute suspension.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Eight minutes past.

Nigel Adams: I have about nine minutes left—that is about right. My thanks go to a great Parliamentary Private Secretary.

Issues with the current five-year land supply model and slow build-out were a key feature of the housing White Paper. The Government are seeking to address that through a package of reforms to the planning system, including revising the national planning policy framework, which will be published this summer. The review of the NPPF is fundamental to delivering the 300,000 homes a year we need, and sets out a comprehensive approach to ensure that we get the right homes, built in the right places and to the right quality.

The revised framework implements around 80 reforms that were announced last year, and retains the emphasis on development that is both sustainable and locally led. Those changes include clearer expectations of local authorities and developers to deliver their commitment to unlock land, fulfil planning permissions, provide essential infrastructure, and ensure that homes are built to meet the diverse needs and expectations of communities. The measures include a standardised way of assessing local housing need; reforming the plan-making system to ensure that every part of the country produces, maintains and implements an up-to-date plan; and an opportunity for local authorities to have their five-year housing land supply agreed on an annual basis. The last two points are particularly relevant to today’s important debate.

It is important that local authorities plan effectively for the new housing required in their areas. Ultimately, new homes need to be provided through up-to-date local plans, produced in consultation with local people and communities. These are a vital element of the planning system. They are the starting point for planning decisions by planning authorities and inspectors. I welcome the progress that Babergh District Council, working with Mid Suffolk District Council, has made with their local plan preparations. I understand that the local authorities are aiming to submit them for examination by the Planning Inspectorate in spring next year.

It is important that adequate land is available to build the homes we need. Local authorities play their part by producing up-to-date local plans and identifying a five-year supply of housing sites. That provides clarity to local communities and developers about where homes should be built so that development is planned rather than the result of speculative applications. Every right hon. and hon. Member in the Chamber will have had experience of that. I have great sympathy with communities that feel that they have no control over planning, and nobody wants to see companies overtly gaming the system. However, we need more homes, and that is why communities should consider a neighbourhood plan—championed by many right hon. and hon. Members here today—to give them more control over the issue.

Demonstrating a deliverable pipeline of housing sites has been a long-standing Government policy. Since the existing NPPF was introduced in 2012, local planning authorities have been asked to identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites, and to demonstrate a five-year land supply. Where the local authority cannot demonstrate that, the lack of supply means that plan policies are not considered to be up-to-date, and applications are assessed against the presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not, and should not, mean development at all costs. Any adverse impacts of the development will still need to be taken into account.

The housing White Paper acknowledged that the current policy has been effective in bringing forward more permissions but has had some negative effects, as we have heard today from my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk. In response, we have proposed reforms to how land supply is calculated. The draft revised NPPF includes proposals to allow local authorities to agree their five-year housing land supply position on an annual basis and to fix it for a one-year period. The
Department believes that taking up that opportunity should reduce the number and complexity of appeals, and provide greater certainty to all parties.

**James Cartlidge:** The Minister is making a fantastic speech. I am glad he has reached that point about appeals, because it seems to me very welcome that once someone has the five-year land supply and it has been signed off, they then have 12 months of security. At the moment, as soon as a council says, “We’ve got the five-year land supply,” there can be an immediate appeal by a developer and the certainty goes away. The issue therefore arises with councils that do not yet have the five-year land supply and do not have that security, but are giving many permissions. Can there be greater flexibility on that, as my hon. Friend for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) suggested?

**Nigel Adams:** My hon. Friend raises a valid point. We are hopeful that that will go a long way to eradicating some of the issues that he and right hon. and hon. Members have experienced. The idea is that it can be fixed at a one-year period. We will also see what other reforms are proposed as part of the review that my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin) is planning.

It is worth mentioning that in return for being allowed to agree their five-year housing land supply position on an annual basis and to fix it for a one-year period, local authorities will need to be more realistic in planning to meet housing needs. The draft NPPF includes further clarity on how to calculate five-year land supply, and we intend to provide further guidance to support local authorities in their role.

I know my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk has concerns about the time that it takes to build homes after sites are identified and permission is granted. The Government want homes to be built faster, and expect house builders to deliver more homes, more quickly and to a high standard. However, as my hon. Friend mentioned, it is important to recognise that after planning permission for new homes is granted, a variety of factors can prevent development from starting and can slow down delivery.

Last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset was commissioned to examine what can be done to speed up building on major sites. The review has been looking into the build-out of sites that have been granted planning permission. The aim is to close the significant gap between housing completions and the amount of land permissioned for new homes. The initial analysis, which was published last month, has presented some interesting findings on the delays in building out large sites and what helps to speed up build-out rates. I look forward to reading the final report, which is due in the autumn.

Coming on to the points raised by right hon. and hon. Members, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk talked about local communities not having a say on speculative development. Applications for speculative development are still subject to local consultation, as are all planning applications. He also mentioned, as others did, that existing permissions are not being taken into account. The draft NPPF encourages the use of shorter timescales for starting development before the permission will expire, to encourage developers to build the permitted homes more quickly.

The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), who is flying the flag brilliantly for Her Majesty’s Opposition, talked about viability assessments. We recognise those concerns and, again, the draft NPPF includes new policies on viability assessments. My right hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) talked about burning effigies at the start of his speech; that was slightly worrying, as I live in York, where Guy Fawkes was from. I hope my right hon. Friend takes that into account. Neighbourhood planning protection was included in the draft NPPF. We consulted on the draft wording, and I thank him for his continued work and suggestions in this area. We are considering those responses and will publish the final NPPF in the summer.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell), who does a fantastic job as the champion of neighbourhood planning, said that the Government do not know how many authorities have a five-year land supply. Guidance is being produced to advise local planning authorities on how to publish their supply figure, so it will be publicly accessible.

I thank and pay tribute to Councillors Lamb and Stephenson, the hard-working councillors of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke), who continue to fight for their local communities but appear to be being ignored by their local council, Leeds City Council. I hope that Leeds will have heard today’s debate and my hon. Friend’s excellent contribution. My hon. Friend the Member for North East Derbyshire (Lee Rowley) talked about the reporting of a five-year land supply. Alongside the—

6.8 pm

Motion lapsed, and sitting adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 10(14)).
I wish to begin, as we approach the 70th anniversary of our NHS, by thanking all those who have made that institution all that it is. I have said that in other places, but I wanted to say it publicly now in Westminster Hall. Many political parties have had the opportunity to be part of the creation of our great NHS, and many of us have had the opportunity to be cared for by it, both surgically—in operations—and through the care that nurses provide in hospitals, which I personally have had on three occasions over the past year. I am thankful to every person involved in the NHS, from the porter to the paediatric consultant, from the occupational therapist to the oncologist, from the scrub nurse to the surgeon, from the auxiliary nurse to the audiology clinician, and all people in between. I thank them all very much for all that they do for us as patients, but also for us as a nation. I want to put that on the record.

I thank NHS staff for making the NHS work in situations that often seem unworkable, due to stress and pressure. As the Democratic Unionist party’s spokesperson on health, I am frequently contacted by those who need more than the service has to offer. A great many times we focus on the problems of the NHS and where we are—that is the way life is—but we also need to reflect on how good it is and how much we owe it.

People often come to us with their problems; they do not necessarily come to us to tell us how good a job we are doing. Perhaps half a dozen people will call in a week to say what a good a job we are doing, but hundreds of others will come to us with their complaints. That is the nature of the job. It is not about complaining; it is part of the job. I believe that I must highlight where we are going wrong, or perhaps where we can do things better. We must see if we can do things along those lines.

Today it is my desire to thank all those who work in the NHS so tirelessly, who do not always get the recognition they deserve. The NHS is our nation’s greatest asset. A Member said in the main Chamber today during business questions that the NHS was probably our nation’s greatest accomplishment. I tend to agree, as I am sure would many others. The NHS embodies our British values of compassion and fairness. It represents our nation’s strong sense of justice and the desire to help those in need. With its quality of care and pioneering scientific research, it is a world-leading institution.

Across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the NHS works in partnership with many universities and private companies on research and development for drugs that can help save lives. Queen’s University Belfast is one of those universities, and I know that because it is one of the institutions that I would call in on. Indeed, just three months ago I visited its cancer research team to see the scientific work they are doing. They were over here this week, along with staff from breast cancer charities, in the Attlee suite in Portcullis House, and we had a chance to catch up. What they are doing is trying to find cures for cancer at all levels is incredible. There is also the complexity of breast cancer treatment to consider, because many people have different variations, so the drugs they take must be just as varied.

The NHS is the type of British export that can help underpin the UK’s global Britain vision, which I believe we lead the world on and which we can be the forerunners for. Health for all, which is the bedrock of this most beloved institution, is a principle that the UK originated in 1948, when it first embarked on the altruistic duty of creating a national health system to provide care to everyone, everywhere, without their having to experience financial hardship.

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): I agree with everything the hon. Gentleman has said so far about the NHS. I saw its merits at first hand when I had a baby two years ago. However, I wish to make a point about the current shortage in the NHS of the BCG vaccine, which is used to treat tuberculosis. My constituent, Hussein, is 11 months old. He was born in Lebanon but is a British citizen. His parents have told me that their GP said that Hussein cannot have the BCG vaccine on the NHS because he was born outside the UK. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that although our NHS has a fantastic track record in tackling diseases and providing care, in order for it to have a successful future every British citizen must be entitled to the preventive medicines on offer?

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I know that the Minister, like me, listened carefully to what she said. If there is clearly the anomaly that she outlines, the NHS should reply and make the vaccine available. I am quite incredulous that someone who is a citizen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland cannot have it. That is almost impossible to understand. I am sure that the hon. Lady will receive a response from the Minister in whatever time is left at the end of the debate.

The NHS is the purest and simplest definition of universal health coverage, and it is the world’s oldest and most successful model. The World Health Organisation estimates that half the world’s population lack access to
essential healthcare services and that 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty by healthcare expenses. We have problems as well. I get frustrated sometimes when constituents come to me. I am referring to Northern Ireland, where health is a devolved matter and therefore not the Minister’s responsibility, but I believe that these cases illustrate some of the issues. A constituent told me this week that a consultant had said to them, “Well, you’re going to have to wait maybe 53 weeks for an operation.” If people want to have an operation through private healthcare, however, they are told that it could maybe be done before the end of the month. As always, if someone can pay for something, they can have it done. We have these problems within the NHS in Northern Ireland and, I suspect, across the rest of the United Kingdom.

As I said, the World Health Organisation estimates that half the world’s population lack access to essential healthcare services and that some 100 million people are pushed into extreme poverty by healthcare expenses. Behind these horrifying statistics are tragic human stories of unnecessary loss and suffering. My parliamentary aide, who does a lot of speech writing and research for me, has travelled to Africa to work every summer, usually in Swaziland but also in Zimbabwe over the past couple of years. That is through Elim Missions, which is a church group in my constituency. She used to visit Africa every summer, during the recess, but she now has two young girls and has not been for a few years. When she came home each year, the tales she would tell about the hospitals she visited would break your heart.

Let me tie together these two stories: first, our NHS; and secondly—perhaps this is for DFID—the responsibility that I believe we have to reach out and help other countries. I referred to that in my earlier discussion with the Minister. My aide’s stories would really have broken your heart. The children’s ward was full of the cast-offs from hospitals in the UK. I do not mean that disrespectfully, because we do that in Northern Ireland—Elim Missions and many other groups do it. We fill containers with second-hand hospital apparatus that might need repairs and we send it out to Zimbabwe, Swaziland and other countries around the world. The equipment can still be used, but sometimes it is worse for wear. We would not put our children anywhere near some of those conditions, but the staff we met made use of all that apparatus and all those materials.

Children in orphanages went without basic medical care until nurses from the UK gave up years of their lives to provide medical training to local communities, for example on the importance of sterilisation. Sometimes the issues can be small, but necessary, such as the simple effect of drops. The hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and I were talking this morning about some other things. He said that when he was in Africa his son was taken very ill with pneumonia at eight months old. They did not have the small antibiotic drops that were needed, but once his son got them he became much better and got over the illness. That shows how small things can make a difference and how important it is that we do them.

The Luke Commission is a charity that has been operating since 2005. It takes free healthcare and hope to the most isolated populations in Swaziland. Mobile hospital outreach sites are set up in the remotest parts of that small country. The population is scattered and dispersed. Patients are tested, counselled and linked to treatment for HIV/AIDS. Swaziland has some of the highest levels of HIV in the whole world, and the whole of Africa in particular. Those suspected of having TB are X-rayed and started on medication. Voluntary male circumcisions are performed in an on-site 11-bed operating room, as studies have shown that the rate of HIV transmission is cut by 60% in circumcised males. Those are practical actions that can be taken to change things. More and more evidence indicates that lack of male circumcision is one of the primary reasons why the HIV prevalence rate is so high. These actions can reduce that. Nurses travel back to rural communities to check on newly circumcised men to ensure that they are healing, to answer questions and to provide HIV prevention education.

At the mobile hospital sites, schoolchildren are treated for skin and intestinal problems. Young people are fitted with new shoes. Those are practical, small things that can make a difference. I put on record my thanks to the Elim church charity and to the many other charities and churches across my constituency that gather products, whether clothes, shoes, medication or hospital apparatus—whatever it may be—to help fit out some of these places in Swaziland, Zimbabwe and further afield.

Handicapped people are analysed by Luke Commission medical personnel and given bush wheelchairs—they need a wheelchair that is practical. Follow-up treatment for patients with HIV, chronic disease, complex medical disease and various cancers is offered. Those who need their eyesight receive vision services and glasses, if needed. There is an ophthalmic surgical programme primarily focused on the removal of cataracts, which are a serious issue in parts of Africa. Those practical changes can be made easily. They do not need a lot of money or investment, but they can change lives. Can you imagine, Mr McCabe, not having your eyesight? Of all the things in the world that you would never want to lose, it would be your eyesight. I say that as someone who has worn glasses since I was eight. I understand the importance.

Packets of medication are distributed by the thousands every day, each prescribed by a doctor with instructions on usage in the mother tongue so that they are understood. Psychosocial and grief counselling is available, too. The pain and the tears they have are no less than the pain and tears we have. Some of the things that happen to them happen because they do not have medical treatment available. The Luke Commission team of nearly 100 people treated more than 61,000 patients in 2015. We can do a lot more with small things, but how many more could we affect?

Most recently, a young lady from my constituency gave up her time during her summer to help the Luke Commission. So many others from the UK give up their time to make a difference. Would the Minister be so kind as to outline the initiatives that are in place? I understand his remit may not stretch to that, but it would be helpful if he could give us some idea. What initiatives are in place to encourage our knowledge and skills to be shared worldwide, like the schemes of Doctors Without Borders and the Luke Commission? How are the Government sharing and disseminating the expertise and learning generated from the NHS with Health Ministers in developing countries?
We have great partnerships and the wonderful NHS. We are celebrating the NHS's 70 years of tremendous work, but we should be trying to show other countries what we can do. Will the Minister give us some idea of how we can help developing countries? I believe that is our duty, and I would like to better understand how we can fulfil it. We need to take up the mantle and do more in our constituencies. We are doing practical, physical and financial things through churches and other charities that directly help in Africa and other countries across the world.

Countries in the developing world are already showcasing their ingenuity and political will in delivering universal healthcare. For example, Bangladesh has achieved wonders in national health in the last 25 years. More than 95% of Bangladeshi children are now fully immunised—that is tremendous. There have been other massive improvements: breastfeeding is near universal, and the level of stunting in children under five declined from 51% in 2004 to 36% in 2014—a significant decrease, showing what we can do if we influence and help both physically and practically. Community outreach by a skilled cadre of female community workers was instrumental in achieving almost universal immunisation coverage, the world’s highest coverage of oral rehydration solution, greater uptake of family planning, and innovative solutions for community-based management of sick newborn babies and severe and acute malnutrition.

Bangladesh is a world leader in reducing child mortality, but pneumonia remains a major challenge for policy makers. Sadly, childhood pneumonia is prevalent across many countries. The stats are alarming: every minute of every day, including today, two young lives are lost to pneumonia; in 2016, it claimed nearly a million children under the age of five in developing countries—more than HIV, TB and malaria combined. If we had the antibiotics available, we could tackle a lot of those problems. Pneumonia is a killer that leaves children gasping for breath and fighting for their lives, but it is also a disease that we have the power to prevent, diagnose and treat. We can do that, so how can we do it better to save those million children’s lives?

We know that an accessible and free health system is the most effective way of treating pneumonia. A fully integrated universal healthcare model can care for a child from the moment they are born until they reach adulthood. That will prevent deaths from pneumonia, which is the biggest killer. We are here today to find out what more can be done to provide UHC in countries around the world, including those in Africa and the middle east, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries where these problems occur. Millions of people around the world are denied their most basic rights of access to healthcare. We have UHC in this country, and I would like to think that one day we will be able to make it available across the world. As beneficiaries of the NHS, everyone in this room must believe we want everyone to have what we have: a system that is fair and free. We must therefore take steps to change things.

Pneumonia is a prevalent issue within the Commonwealth, too. Save the Children has calculated that children under the age of five living in Commonwealth countries are two to three times more likely to die from pneumonia than children living in non-Commonwealth countries. When we hear those stats, we realise how big the difference is that we have to try to reduce. Will the UK Government raise the subject at the next Commonwealth Health Ministers meeting? If the Minister is in a position to use that power, I ask him to do so. He should certainly contact the relevant Department to ensure that it happens.

What leadership role can the UK Government play, given that the UK is the chair of the Commonwealth for the next two years? I would like to think we can use that influential role. I know we will, but perhaps we should be reminded that we have that opportunity. We should try hard to make things happen.

I am incredibly pleased to have one of the world’s foremost research and medical centres in the wonderful Queen’s University. The steps taken in improving healthcare worldwide have been tremendous, including the most recent breakthrough regarding the targeting of antibiotics for pneumonia using groundbreaking cancer treatment technology. I mentioned Queen’s at the beginning of my speech, but I mention it again, because it is at the forefront of breakthrough technology. I asked Queen’s for a little more in-depth information regarding the breakthrough. That information is certainly something to be proud of. The Queen’s research team indicated that our struggle against infectious diseases is far from over, but they, with other universities, research and development bodies and private companies, are doing their best to make things happen. Globalisation has increased the risk of pandemics, which we get regularly, reminding us that whenever we accomplish something, another disease and pandemic comes along, and sometimes existing drugs are useless.

Unsurprisingly, antimicrobial resistance—AMR—is included in the recently released UK Government national risk register of civil emergencies that may directly affect the UK over the next five years. Our Government have been instrumental in assisting and responding, and it is always good that they do that. More than 80,000 deaths in the UK are estimated if there is a widespread outbreak of a resistant microbe. Far from being an apocalyptic fantasy, a post-antibiotic era in which common infections and minor injuries can kill is a very real possibility for the 21st century. We can never rest on our laurels with what we have done. We need to step forward and be aware of what we need to do in the time ahead. New diseases are always developing, and there is always a need to match them. We should pay respect and give credit to organisations that do that well.

The O’Neill review on AMR sets out the global threat by highlighting that drug-resistant infections already kill hundreds of thousands of people a year globally. By 2050, it could be as many as 10 million—one person every three seconds. If we needed a reminder of the importance of the issue, that would be the figure. I am not sure if anybody in the Chamber will be around in 2050—I certainly will not be—but those who are could well face one of the debilitating diseases that we need to research now.

Of particular concern is the mounting prevalence of infections caused by multi-drug-resistant gram-negative bacteria, in particular Klebsiella pneumoniae. That pathogen has been singled out as an urgent threat to human health by the UK Government, the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and the World Health Organisation due to extremely drug-resistant strains. Notably, Klebsiella infections have increased by 12% in the UK alone over the last five years. That tells us how things are developing, and that we need to be prepared.
Professor Chris Scott, the interim director of the Centre for Cancer Research and Cell Biology, is an expert in nanotechnology. In June, he teamed up with Professor Jose Bengoechea, director of the Wellcome-Wolfson Institute for Experimental Medicine, who is a world expert on infections by multi-drug-resistant pathogens, chiefly Klebsiella pneumonieae. Professor Bengoechea’s team discovered that it is possible to use the nanotechnology approaches that Professor Scott is developing for cancer to try to treat the bacteria that reside inside human cells and combat that pathogen. We have to listen to the experts and ask them to take things forward in the right way.

Although there is clearly a need for new antibiotic drugs, which must be the Government’s main focus in tackling the potential tsunami of antimicrobial resistance that we face, Queen’s research shows that with effective delivery of antibiotics we will gain a better therapeutic effect against a main protagonist of pneumonia. The complex scientific work that Queen’s is doing should make a difference. Patients may need to take an inhaler of particles containing antibiotics, as opposed to a simple tablet, in the specific case of pneumonia. It is possible that an advanced formulation of drugs could slow resistance developing in some instances and generate better outcomes for patients. It may also mean that we could extend the useful lifespan of some of our current antibiotics. To take that to patients, we need to prepare clinical grade material, but advanced formulations such as nanomedicine are difficult to manufacture. Life is never straightforward, but when we are given a challenge we have to take it on.

Investment is needed in the UK to provide facilities that can advance these excellent therapeutic strategies before they can be tested on humans. We have a process to go through and we must walk along those lines. When we come to the end of the road, we want to ensure that the medication is appropriate and safe. Additional funding needs to be allocated to new approaches to treat infections. Again, the Minister may wish to tell us how the Government are working through the Department of Health and Social Care with universities, companies and research and development on how that process can work, and perhaps how it can work better.

By thinking outside the box, as exemplified by the Queen’s University Belfast research, we will find much-needed new therapeutics. Several projects at Queen’s University Belfast are reaching the pre-clinical stage and are being stalled by the lack of investment, since pharma are still not interested in supporting this essential work. There are ways of going forward, but we need a wee bit of security as well. The lady from Queen’s University who was here this week talking about breast cancer research was funded through one of the Government Departments in Northern Ireland. Queen’s University also gave her a position, which brought her a bit of income. That meant that she could do her research here in the UK, and we in the UK can get the advantage and try to advance that as well. Other UK Government schemes, such as those supported by Innovate UK, also fall short in supporting pre-clinical work because there is still no commitment from pharma. I ask the Minister to consider standing in the breach, if that is possible, and supplying the necessary support and funding for Queen’s and other research centres to help us to do better.

It is expected that by 2035 more than 500,000 people in the UK will be diagnosed with cancer each year. To ensure that our health service can meet future demand, action to prevent cancer and other diseases must be at the forefront of any approach. We have heard today some of the figures, certainly on the mainland in relation to cancer and some of the delays. There are many problems in the NHS, but we are here to help the Minister and to encourage him and the Department of Health to move forward.

The Government must train and employ more staff to diagnose and treat cancers earlier. We can be proud of what the UK Government—our Government—do on healthcare, but we strive to do more, and the Minister strives to do more. The Department of Health is already looking across the world to see how it can share expertise. The Department for International Development is helping countries to strengthen their healthcare systems. What else could we achieve if we joined up the dots and worked together more on implementing universal healthcare?

We should encourage countries to raise their own domestic resources for healthcare, which could have a transformative impact. DFID has been fantastic at supporting the health system to strengthen, but that is not always free, which leaves behind the poorest and most marginalised. I referred earlier to those who are unable to get their operation through the NHS, but are offered the opportunity to pay for it. I am very unhappy with that system; it suits some people, but not everyone. We have to be ever mindful that some of the poorest and most marginalised people in countries across the world are at the bottom rung of the healthcare ladder. We should share our expertise on domestic funding for the NHS with Governments around the world, encouraging Governments to spend more on healthcare.

From 2011 to 2015 there was a cross-Government strategy on global healthcare. An update strategy could include recommendations on domestic resource mobilisation. I understand that the Department of Health has a global health team. It would be helpful to know the remit of that team and how they co-ordinate with DFID on global health issues. What is the connection? Do they have any input to the policy, strategy and the way forward? Do they have regular meetings?

In February 2014, the world watched in horror as Ebola swept across many parts of Africa. We in this country did our bit immediately to respond. We sent our service personnel, our experts and our medication. We were not found wanting, and we never will be. The horror turned to pride as we saw that role that UK aid and our healthcare professionals played in stopping Ebola and saving lives. We should be immensely proud of what our people did, and what our Government did and continue to do. That was the UK Government at their best. They co-ordinated the response to a major global health crisis and supported a country’s health system. How well that was done! We owe thanks to those personnel and to our Government for leading the way. We would never wish for Ebola or something similar to return. What can be done to implement that sort of cross-Government approach to supporting health systems?
I thank hon. Members for coming along to support me, and the Minister for coming along to respond. I thank hon. Members for their time. How does the Minister believe we can excel, improve and achieve an even higher level of global care?

2.1 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe. I congratulate the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) on securing this debate. It is a thoughtful and appropriate way to mark NHS70. I pay tribute to him for his typically expert and heartfelt speech.

Whatver the difference between our parties and the Governments of the UK on the details of health policy, we all agree about the extraordinary benefits that the national health service brings as a universal healthcare service, and about its immense contribution in tackling preventable and communicable diseases in this country, not just through treatment but through immunisation and other public health measures. I pay tribute to all NHS staff for their immense dedication and service. Like other hon. Members, I have benefited from the NHS’s care on many occasions, and I will forever be grateful for that.

As the hon. Gentleman said, that is not to say that the job is done. There are things to improve, but we are fortunate to have been born in a country with such a system, given that so many others are not. In the absence of universal health coverage in some countries, many are excluded from the healthcare they need, sometimes including the most basic care. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, as recently as December 2017, it was reported that at least half the world’s population cannot access essential health services, and almost 100 million people are forced to live in extreme poverty simply because of the expenses associated with healthcare.

It is not just a question of finance and infrastructure; it is also about the barriers caused by culture, prejudice and even draconian and inhumane laws. The hon. Gentleman set out some of the tragic consequences for the affected individuals. For example, the terrible incidence of pneumonia among children in certain countries is a tragedy for individuals, for family after family and for community after community. It is also a disaster for those countries’ economies and public finances. In short, it is a circle of despair.

That is exactly why the goal of universal health coverage is enshrined in sustainable development goal 3—“health for all”—and is a global priority for the World Health Organisation and other international organisations. In simple terms, that means we need to work towards ensuring access to skilled medical professionals in good-quality facilities. We still have a long way to go even in that regard, particularly in the poorest countries and the remotest areas, where even the most basic of issues, such as access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, remain challenging. Without those things in place, facilities cannot function effectively.

That is not an end to the matter. The goal of universal health coverage will not be realised unless good-quality care is provided without discrimination. There is no point in having facilities and doctors if absence rates among healthcare staff are 60%, as sometimes happens in certain countries. The goal is fatally undermined if discrimination against the most marginalised people, some of whom are the most in need of healthcare, means that they cannot access its full benefits or that they receive substandard treatment. In short, the goal is not simply universal health coverage but effective universal health coverage.

Disease-specific programmes continue to have a vital role to play, but ultimately diseases such as malaria, HIV/AIDS and many others can be eradicated only by establishing universal health coverage, which we sometimes take for granted in our country. That also means ensuring that HIV services are part of a universal health coverage system. People with HIV can often be among the most marginalised in a country—for example, sex workers and men who have sex with men. That can mean that their ability to pay for treatment is even more limited, and they face additional hurdles, such as culture, prejudice and inhumane criminal laws.

I am not slow to criticise the UK Government when they get it wrong, so it is only fair that I praise them when they get it right. I will do that in a moment. The goal of extending universal health coverage around the world will not be assisted by poorly planned and abrupt withdrawals by the Department for International Development from countries without a proper transition. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact gave an amber-red warning to DFID’s transition programmes. The Government have responded to that warning, but it is vital that, as that work is taken forward, DFID ensures that its transition programmes promote UHC and prioritise access to services for the most marginalised communities before it makes its exit.

I recognise that the UK has been a key global leader on this issue in years gone by, and long may that continue. This Government, and any Government, will have our support if they continue to pursue the goals in the universal health coverage 2030 partnership. We need to use the NHS’s expertise and experience to help shape new universal systems in other countries. We should continue to use DFID to put other Governments in a position to support such systems and end reliance on charges and out-of-pocket spending. We want the Foreign Office to be used fully to argue for an increase in health spending and an end to draconian criminal laws that marginalise communities and make access to healthcare difficult. We should continue to support efforts to better measure progress on who has access to universal healthcare and the quality of care they are receiving, so that we can check, for example, that HIV treatment is reaching marginalised communities.

We should continue to support non-governmental organisations and civil society in helping people to access healthcare and hold their national Governments to account. We should continue to be a leader in research and development. The hon. Member for Strangford rightly highlighted the work at Queen’s University, but universities across the United Kingdom play a pivotal role in researching diseases that affect low and middle-income countries.

We need to work with other countries and the World Health Organisation to create a global road map on access to medicines, and to end what is sometimes a medicine rip-off. That means encouraging the de-linking of research and development costs from medicine prices, and defending the use of so-called TRIPs flexibilities—those under the agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual
property rights—by low-income countries seeking to access medicines. It would be particularly helpful to hear a bit from the Government about their commitment to pushing for protecting such flexibilities in the outcome document from the forthcoming high-level meeting on tuberculosis, which I understand is to take place in September.

If all that helps to achieve the universal health coverage goal for 2030, then the NHS’s 82nd birthday will be an even more significant and happier occasion than its 70th.

2.8 pm
Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr McCabe, on this historic day—the 70th anniversary of the founding of the NHS. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for securing this important debate and for his passionate speech. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) and the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) for their contributions. Finally, I thank the Backbench Business Committee for granting time for this debate, especially on the NHS’s 70th birthday.

It is an honour to be here to speak about our NHS and the example it has set for the rest of the world. When introducing the National Health Service Bill to the House of Commons, Bevan said: “I believe it will lift the shadow from millions of homes. It will keep very many people alive who might otherwise be dead. It will relieve suffering...It will be a great contribution towards the wellbeing of the common people of Great Britain.”—[Official Report, 30 April 1946, Vol. 422, c. 63.]

Seventy years on, those words still ring true in the UK. That is why the Labour party will always defend our NHS from Government funding cuts and from ever-increasing marketisation, which opens the door to unwanted privatisation. We remain committed to defending our NHS so that it continues to be the fairest and best healthcare system in the entire world. While we celebrate today, however, it is easy to forget that across the world, as we heard from the hon. Member for Strangford, some of the poorest and most vulnerable people are being denied the basic right to health services that we enjoy and indeed take for granted.

In December 2017 the World Health Organisation reported that at least half of the world’s population did not have access to essential health services. It also found that 800 million people spent at least 10% of their household budget on health expenses for themselves, a sick child or other family member, and that for almost 100 million people, the expenses associated with healthcare meant that they were forced to live in poverty.

That widespread lack of access to healthcare contributes to the global epidemic of vaccine-preventable diseases, widespread malnutrition and other health-related problems. Following on from the hon. Gentleman, I shall add some examples to the debate. Globally, 2.6 million children died in the first month of life in 2016, largely due to lack of quality care at birth or skilled care and treatment after birth. More than 20% of births throughout the world still take place without the presence of a skilled birth attendant, and in sub-Saharan Africa that figure rises to more than 40%.

Pneumonia is now the biggest infectious killer of children, claiming nearly 1 million lives each year, or two children every minute. Pneumonia is preventable and treatable; that so many children are dying of it is shameful. Globally, only 4% of HIV-positive people who inject drugs have access to HIV treatment, and that also increases the risk of HIV transmission among those who use drugs. Behind such awful statistics are tragic human stories of unnecessary loss and suffering. When we invest in health, we invest in people, no matter where they are in the world.

Universal health coverage means that everyone can receive the healthcare services that they need without the worry of suffering financial hardship. It can therefore protect countries from epidemics, reduce poverty and the risk of hunger, create jobs—as we know, the NHS is the biggest employer in the country—drive economic growth and enhance gender equality. Given the world-class reputation of our NHS, the UK Government have a huge part to play in encouraging other countries to establish universal health coverage, and we should be proud that we have such a prestigious role in leading the way on health.

I am pleased that the Government are committed to delivering the UN’s sustainable development goals, which include universal health coverage. Indeed, we should all be committed to ensuring that people live healthy lives, no matter where they live. Will the Minister tell us whether his Department has worked with other Governments from around the world to promote universal healthcare coverage? Which countries has he worked with on that?

Public Health England has developed a global health strategy to look into building public health capacity, particularly in low and middle-income countries, as well as sharing excellence by working in partnership and building on the UK’s strengths. Does the Department of Health have any plans to develop a global health strategy with a specific focus on universal healthcare coverage? Does the Department have regular conversations with Public Health England and colleagues in the Department for International Development to discuss universal healthcare coverage and how to promote it around the world?

Seventy years ago everyone in the UK was granted access to free healthcare, regardless of how much they earned or where they lived. Sadly, millions around the world are still missing out on access to such a basic human right, and people are dying because of it. It should be the ambition of us all on this special day to ensure that that right is enjoyed by everyone around the world. I support the Government on any aims that they might have to do that.

2.14 pm
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine): I am sorry for my musical chairs during the debate, Mr McCabe, but I could not hear everyone from the end of the Chamber—I think it is my age and the heat. I thank the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) for, as always, an interesting speech. I congratulate him, especially today—birthday day—on securing the debate in his residence of Westminster Hall. He mentioned that he might still be here in 2050—I would almost hazard a wager with the hon. Gentleman about that one, but I hope we shall all still be here.
Was not 5 July 1948 a pivotal day for our country, with the inauguration of healthcare free at the point of use for all our citizens? Seven decades later, the NHS remains one of our nation’s most loved institutions. The NHS is often described as the closest thing we have to a national religion, and this lunchtime a service in Westminster Abbey proved the point. The NHS is one of our country’s crowning achievements, possibly the crowning achievement—along with the English football team, of course—and it is the envy of people across the globe. When I travel around the world in this job, people are fascinated by and envious of the NHS in equal measure.

As has been said by my shadow, the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), and everyone else who has spoken today, the NHS is of course nothing without its fantastic staff, who show such a level of Christian compassion—some without even knowing it—day in, day out. More than 1.5 million people work each day to provide the best possible care for our constituents.

The questions that the hon. Member for Strangford asked are important. We are the proud owners of an excellent universal healthcare system, albeit one we come to strengthen, as we must—the nation is prepared to criticise, and the NHS is not above criticism in our struggle to make it better—but he asked what we are doing to share our experiences. I shall certainly be able to cover that point.

The health of UK citizens is not dependent only on action in the UK. Diseases do not respect borders, and we need to act internationally to protect ourselves as well as to help others. Not only is that relevant when an outbreak hits—recently we had an Ebola outbreak, which I have monitored closely—but we must keep working with other nations to strengthen their capacity to prevent, detect and respond to diseases. UHC is critical to that. Threats such as that of antimicrobial resistance, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his opening remarks, can be tackled only through global action.

There is much that we can learn from each other. The NHS has evolved a huge amount since the late 1940s, and the next 70 years will require ongoing adaptation and innovation as we deal with the challenges of a million more over-70s—the ageing population—and further reap the rewards of scientific advancements, which have been so central to the NHS in its first 70 years. Other countries develop innovative approaches that we may not yet have considered—it is not all about the great empire of Britain, telling the rest of the world how things shall be—and there are plenty of challenges that no one has yet cracked. We should work together, and we do. It is right that we support others who have not yet achieved universal health coverage to do so, including by sharing our experiences.

We are committed to delivering the sustainable development goals, which the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) mentioned, including SDG 3. That is crucial to tackling many other health challenges, including the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health, as he said, and specific diseases such as TB, HIV, malaria and—everyone rightly mentioned this—pneumonia, the single largest infectious cause of death in children worldwide.

Universal health coverage is a goal, not a blueprint. Country needs, plans and perspectives are central to our work, and we have no interest in imposing an NHS model. It is crucial for each country to find its own path to UHC, which may entail greater private sector involvement, if that is what the country wishes, or a national health insurance scheme if that is what politicians are brave enough to do. That is not our choice, but it is the choice in some parts of the world. We cannot just go with our judgment in trying to help other countries achieve universal health coverage.

Poorer, marginalised populations must achieve better access to good-quality essential services without the risk of financial hardship, as we choose in our NHS. Support for UHC must also involve helping countries to achieve sustainable funding mechanisms for their system, whichever they choose. The countries in greatest need deserve our financial support, but the ultimate goal must remain to transition to domestic funding, so that countries can maintain health systems in the long term.

The UK engages on UHC in a number of international forums. We strongly support the World Health Organisation’s focus on UHC through its new general programme of work, and we provide funding through a number of DFID programmes. We engage on this topic at governing body meetings and our annual UK-WHO strategic dialogue. I have a good, open and direct relationship with the head of the WHO, as part of my responsibility for international health at the Department of Health and Social Care. Underpinning the WHO’s success is a strong and effective organisation, and the UK continues to promote the leadership of the WHO so that it is the best it can be. As the second largest donor to the WHO, we are in a very strong position in that regard.

We promote UHC as a priority in other forums such as the G20 and the G7; I attended the G7 Health Ministers meeting last year in Milan. We were pleased to see strong commitments on health in the recent Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, including on eye care, which I am passionate about. We will continue to follow up with the Commonwealth secretariat on the implementation of everything that was agreed in London. The high-level meeting on UHC at the UN General Assembly in 2019 will be an important opportunity to share experiences and to drive greater collective action. I will pass on the hon. Gentleman’s request, which I agree with, for us to use our chairmanship of the Commonwealth to further the UHC agenda that we all believe is so important.

My Department has rightly taken on a global leadership role on patient safety, along with our German and Japanese counterparts, to whom I spoke directly at the G7 Health Ministers meeting last year. Hon. Members will know that patient safety is the central mission of the Secretary of State. It is crucial to universal healthcare—as the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East rightly says, the aim cannot just be universal healthcare but must be good-quality and safe universal healthcare. Providing access but not quality care is not truly delivering on the sustainable development goals. We hosted the first global ministerial summit on patient safety in 2016, bringing together political leaders and experts to galvanise action on this crucial issue. Subsequent summits in Germany and Japan have continued that legacy.

Another key but often overlooked facet of universal health coverage is addressing mental as well as physical health. Again, my Department is taking an international
role: we will host the first global ministerial mental health summit in October. The summit will bring together political leaders, experts by experience, policy makers and civil society to share innovative and effective approaches to mental health care, which the Prime Minister has rightly said is one of her main priorities. The Department of Health and Social Care frequently receives ministerial and official delegations from overseas to look at topics as diverse as childhood obesity, on which we lead the world; emergency response, as we often send people around the world; and elderly care.

The international team, which the hon. Member for Strangford mentioned and which I look after, manages the Department’s bilateral and multilateral engagement, working closely with colleagues at DFID and across Government. The team also leads on co-ordinating global health strategy across Government and on the health implications of trade and of the UK leaving the European Union.

The hon. Gentleman asked about our support for low and middle-income countries. The UK has a number of programmes with those countries. They are largely led by DFID, although a number draw on my Department, the NHS and Public Health England, for which I have ministerial responsibility. The UK supports the aim of countries working towards universal health coverage, with priority given to ensuring that poorer, harder to reach populations achieve better access to good-quality essential services without risk of financial hardship.

We apply a health systems strengthening approach to all health investments. That includes addressing global health security issues such as antimicrobial resistance; scaling up nutrition interventions, which are about building up country resilience; improving reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health; and targeting specific diseases such as HIV, TB and neglected tropical diseases. One of the first things I was able to do in that space was to speak at the family planning summit organised by DFID over the road at County Hall, which was backed by Bill and Melinda Gates, about our record in driving down the teenage pregnancy rate in this country. Of course, getting reproductive health right often helps developing countries to make their health systems more robust and sustainable.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the delicate subject of male circumcisions and HIV. He is right to say that circumcision is practised across many parts of Africa to prevent HIV. The WHO and the UN consider male circumcision to be effective in HIV prevention, where there are heterosexual epidemics and high HIV and low male circumcision prevalence. However, the practice provides only partial protection. The procedure should not be seen as a green light to risky behaviour; it should be one element of a comprehensive HIV protection package. It would be remiss of me not to mention that I get a lot of letters on this subject. A number of campaign groups in this country and around the world make arguments about the human rights elements of the matter, especially when children undergo circumcision surgery, and its impact later in life. It is important to recognise all those facts, but the hon. Gentleman is right to mention it as part of the toolkit used in certain countries, Tanzania being one of the most prevalent.

We provide support directly to countries, work through the WHO and scale up targeted, cost-effective preventive and treatment interventions through global initiatives such as the global health fund, Gavi and the global financing facility. We are the largest donor to Gavi, which provides developing countries with pneumococcal vaccine to protect against the main cause of pneumonia. Between 2010 and 2016, 109 million children received the vaccine; we estimate that saved about 760,000 lives.

The health partnership scheme is another good example of how the UK can use our expertise overseas. Since 2011, we have trained 84,000 health workers across 31 countries. The scheme relies on volunteers from the NHS who help to support the training of staff overseas and benefit themselves through gaining new skills and motivation. Last October, the Minister of State, Department for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who I work closely with across Government, announced the new £30 million programme with the catchy title “Stronger Health Partnerships for Stronger Health Systems”. It will run for five years from 2019 and will support partnerships between leading UK institutions and those in developing countries.

One of the benefits of being the Minister in these debates is that sometimes I can mention the good things that happen in my constituency. Hampshire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which covers the Royal Hampshire County Hospital in Winchester and the Basingstoke and North Hampshire Hospital, has two very good international links, including with Yei in South Sudan, where a number of medical professionals from that county have worked on antibiotic resistance studies, looking at the bacteria that can cause pneumonia. In collaboration with the Rotary Club in Winchester and the Brickworks, which is a Winchester-based charity, it has secured funding for textbooks to repopulate a midwifery and lab training institution and funding to build schools for South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, so that refugee children can continue their primary and secondary education. There will be examples in the constituencies of Members throughout the House of health professionals using such expertise as part of their upskilling, but also to help those less fortunate than us.

The UK offers development opportunities for the medical workforce globally. The medical training initiative allows overseas medical specialists to train in the UK for up to two years, to see our system close up, so that they can return to their home country and apply their skills and knowledge to the benefit of their population. Of course, that benefits the NHS by providing extra staff, who we desperately need, and enhances the clinical capacities of health systems in low and middle-income countries. We estimate that just over 3,300 overseas doctors have taken part since 2009. I know the House will be interested in that positive programme.

We are passionate about tackling AMR, and we are committed to doing so. My Department is working across Government with a wide range of stakeholders to refresh our AMR strategy, which rightly gets a lot of attention in the House, with a view to republishing it at the end of 2018. I know that the hon. Member for Strangford will be interested in that. One of the ambitions we set out in response to Lord O’Neill’s independent review of AMR, which was established by George Osborne when he was at the Treasury, was to halve
healthcare-associated gram-negative bloodstream infections. We are focusing on E. coli infections this year, but we are also collecting data on Klebsiella and Pseudomonas pathogens.

I think there will be a lot of interest among Members in the refreshed AMR strategy. Health Question Time seldom goes by without AMR being mentioned. AMR is important. As the chief medical officer, who is busy in other ways today, has said, it is one of the greatest threats, if not the greatest threat, that our world—not just our healthcare world—faces.

We welcome all new research that contributes to our work to tackle AMR—especially great research such as that produced by Queen’s University Belfast, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. There are a number of funding opportunities, and high-quality proposals are always welcomed. He rightly mentioned that people from Queen’s were at the House yesterday. He and I met them together—we had our photo taken with them—at an excellent Breast Cancer Now event, which was a great chance to hear about some of the incredible research that is being done on that disease in our United Kingdom.

Great research projects often start with relatively small grants from charities such as Breast Cancer Now, which act as the building block for other researchers to jump on board and get with the plan. That is very important. This is not all about the Government starting research projects; it is about institutions such as Queen’s being world-renowned. The lady I met yesterday was clearly on top of her game. She deserves great credit, and I thank her and all her colleagues at Queen’s for the work they do for our country.

We have strong join-up across Government. My Department, DFID, Public Health England and the Foreign Office in particular take a “one HMG” approach to global health, which was recently praised by the Independent Commission for Aid Impact. That includes regular meetings between Ministers, and a co-ordination group of senior officials meets very regularly to look strategically at our international activity and some of the programmes I mentioned. It includes joint delegations to WHO meetings and daily contact between our officials. It also includes joint working on projects such as the UK public health rapid support team. That is a partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care, Public Health England and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine that, at countries’ request, deploys people rapidly to some of the poorest parts of the world to investigate significant disease outbreaks and support capacity building. I mentioned examples of times when that has been invaluable, such as during the Ebola crisis.

In concluding, let me return to the incredible achievements of our NHS over the past 70 years, during which time life expectancy has leapt. Its staff work tirelessly to ensure that it remains the best in the world. We are committed to ensuring that it provides universal health coverage in the UK for generations to come, but we do not keep it all to ourselves—we are desperately keen to go on sharing our knowledge to help other countries do the same, so that people around the world can benefit from the incredible privileges we have in this country.

Steve McCabe (in the Chair): Mr Shannon, would you like to make some concluding remarks?

2.34 pm

Jim Shannon: I certainly would, Mr McCabe. I thank you for chairing the debate so well. I also thank the hon. Members for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald)—my pronunciation is probably all wrong—and for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), whose contributions were immense. The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) highlighted important issues with the BCG vaccine.

I thank the Minister for his comprehensive response. He always says that he is pleased to be in his position because he has a deep interest in the subject, and that was illustrated by his responses to everyone who spoke. He was right to say that we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the NHS and its excellent work, and to focus on what we can do both here and around the world. I am glad he mentioned the importance of remembering, whenever we think about diseases and healthcare in this country, that we also have to prepare for the diseases that come into the country from outside.

We have a joint approach, in which the NHS delivers great healthcare here and we share that healthcare around the world. For that, we are eternally grateful.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered the role of universal health coverage in tackling preventable and treatable diseases.

2.36 pm

Sitting suspended.
It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I rise to mark an important date in British history: 90 years ago, on 2 July, this House ratified the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928. For the first time ever, women were afforded equal rights to men in formal political participation; for the first time ever, women over the age of 21 and women who did not meet arbitrary property qualifications were eligible to vote; and for the first time ever, women made up the majority of the British electorate.

According to the Electoral Commission, in 2017 women were four times more likely than men to cite people fighting to win them the right to vote as a motivation for casting their ballot. Three quarters of women say that they always vote in general elections. This year we rightly celebrate that it is 100 years since some women, through tireless sacrifice and struggle, attained suffrage in the UK, but it would be wrong to forget that many other women—around a third—had to wait another decade to participate fully in this country’s democracy.

During that decade, feminists made advances in their campaign for gender equality across different sectors of British society. On 1 December 1919, Lady Astor became the first woman to take her seat in Parliament. On 23 December 1919, women successfully lobbied Parliament to enact the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act 1919, which prohibited women’s exclusion from most forms of employment and allowed them to obtain professional employment in any civil or judicial office. In 1920, women were finally afforded the privilege of being able to obtain a formal degree from the University of Oxford, despite having already contributed to its structures and studies for decades.

However, most working-class women did not have the opportunity to stand for political office or to seek professional employment in the judiciary or other such posts, and they certainly did not have the resources to study at any university, let alone Oxford. In fact, during the early 20th century the working class had few opportunities indeed. For that reason, the last century saw the intensification and politicisation of workers’ rights and the growth of the trade union and socialist movements whose values form the very foundations of my party.

Even by the time Ramsay MacDonald became, albeit briefly, the first ever Labour Prime Minister in January 1924, working-class women could still not vote. It pains me to imagine how much more could have been permanently achieved if more than one third of our population had not been disenfranchised for so long and at such a crucial time in the history of the British working class. Would we be further along the march to true equality? Would I still have needed to hold this debate?

Because of the hesitant start to the full enfranchisement of women and the working class, even today many of us in this room will have experienced, from a young age, a world that has not always been particularly inclusive or fair to women, minorities, the working class or, broadly speaking, those deemed to be “others” in society.

Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this important debate to mark the 90th anniversary of women attaining equal voting rights to men. Unfortunately, there are still some women who, because of their circumstances, feel unable to vote. One example is survivors of domestic abuse who feel unable to register because they do not want to risk their safety. They may not be aware that, thanks to the Electoral Commission, they can register anonymously. Does my hon. Friend agree that we should pay tribute to the charities, groups and organisations—including the Dash Charity and Hestia in my constituency—that work for women’s empowerment and support victims of domestic abuse?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I am a champion of Hestia, so I know of its brilliant work. The Electoral Commission is making sure that women know that their vote is theirs alone.

While on this important date we note the lost potential and the pain caused by sexism and injustice, we also celebrate the tenacity, bravery and resolve of those who fought tooth and nail against the status quo to reverse the injustices of patriarchy, classism and all forms of discrimination. We must also look at what more needs to be done in the struggle for equality. Working-class women may have attained the vote, but many barriers remain to equal political participation and representation, and equality in all aspects of modern life.

This year has seen a number of cross-party initiatives launched to combat the gender pay gap, seeking to remedy an age-old economic injustice faced by women, much like the political disenfranchisement faced by the suffragettes. However, similar to the disparity faced by working-class women in the 1920s, working-class women and minority ethnic women are far more affected by the inequality of the gender pay gap than their middle-class counterparts. Recent Library research shows that women as a whole bear 86% of the costs of austerity, with working class, disabled and minority ethnic women disproportionately affected by cuts to public services and welfare.

I do not say that to create a rift among different groups of women or to sour the mood on this landmark date, but to remind us that it is our duty as parliamentarians to ensure that all women are adequately represented, both in this place and across the UK. On that note, I have learned since my arrival here a year ago, which I have really taken to heart, that those of us privileged enough to be in this place really are women first and partisan politicians second. We need—indeed, want—to work together to improve women’s lives and the future for girls growing up in this country.

It would not be right to celebrate without recognising that we still have a long way to go in our fight for equality. For example, we know that almost 52% of the UK population is female, yet we still make up only one third of all Members. As a representative of the excellent campaign group 50:50 Parliament, which was started by my brilliant friend Frances Scott, I understand only too well how far we still have to go to achieve a true representation—or simply an accurate picture—of our nation’s population.
Jo Stevens (Cardiff Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. The first general election in which women could stand as candidates was in 1918; then, one female stood in Wales. Last year, 66 candidates in Wales were women, but only 11 of Wales’ 40 MPs are women. Does she agree that we still have a long way to go to achieve parity with our male colleagues?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I am sure that the Welsh Government are doing their bit.

When the debate is reported and shared on social media, I know for certain the comments that will be made, because they always are. Men will type, “Why can women only be represented by women?”, “Why do we need more women?” or, “What difference does it make?” as well as other rude comments that I cannot say. I will tell them why. Do we really think that debates leading to legislation and policy change that focus on issues only or mostly affecting women would be on the Order Paper at all without the growing number of us here? Issues brought to the House by my colleagues in recent years include period poverty, the provision of affordable childcare, maternity leave, the gender pay gap, abortion rights, domestic violence, stalking and sexual harassment to name just a few. Could we really have left those issues in the hope that hundreds of male Members would one day stumble upon them and take them forward on our behalf? No.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that another example of that is the campaign of the Women Against State Pension Inequality? Without those women having the franchise and being able to raise their voices electorally, and without all the women MPs in Parliament, that issue would not be in the public domain in the way that it is.

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. I was happy to meet some of my local WASPI activists yesterday on Parliament Square.

We know that men would not have taken those issues forward because they did not in the hundreds of years that they had this place to themselves, so we came here and did it ourselves. A recent and important Bill on upskirting was almost totally stopped in its tracks. It was tabled by a female MP, the hon. Member for Bath (Wera Hobhouse), and was talked out by a male MP, the hon. Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope), who frankly made a mockery of our Parliament and completely shamed himself. A female Minister is now taking the Bill through the House as the Voyeurism (Offences) (No. 2) Bill, in a Bill Committee made up mostly of women.

Sadly, women still often face societal discrimination and sexism in their everyday lives. Misogyny is rife and in full health. Rather than being consigned to history, it sits at the heart of even current legislation. One particularly disgusting example that is never far from my mind is the so-called two child policy: the epitome and very definition of sexist, disempowering, discriminatory and degrading prejudice towards ordinary working women who are, unlike most people here who get to create the policies, struggling to just get by. That particular policy would not have seemed so out of place 90 or 100 years ago before we marched, starved ourselves, chained ourselves to fences, broke the law, fought back and refused to give in until we got the right to vote.

Although many things have changed, and mostly for the better, so many other things really have not. We have to make sure that the change is not simply on the surface. Women must continue to fight for our rights, for equality, for a seat at the table and a voice in the decision-making processes—not only white, wealthy and middle-class women but working women, disabled women, black and minority ethnic women, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender women; women from all cultures, all religious faiths and every financial background. We must support each other, encourage one another and keep looking around the table to see if we are all represented.

One way in which we can practically commit to that aim is through cross-party solidarity on enacting and fully implementing section 106 of the Equality Act 2010. Section 106 would ensure that all political parties adequately report on the diversity of their candidates, allowing us to scrutinise discriminatory practices and hold parties to account when they fall short of what is necessary for real and true equality. This is an initiative recommended by the Women and Equalities Select Committee, the Labour party’s shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Dawn Butler), the Fawcett Society, CARE International and many more.

Today in the Chamber we were due to debate proxy voting. Two weeks ago, a few of our women MPs, one seriously ill and two very heavily pregnant, were forced to go through the crowded voting Lobbies, which caused them considerable physical discomfort as well as being an extremely unpleasant experience. My hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah) describes it in an article in today’s Guardian as, “degrading, humiliating and downright horrible.”

I agree with her when she says, “It should never have happened.” That practice needs to change as soon as possible, and proxy voting is one option that would put an end to such practices. We need and want to encourage more women to come to this place, and some women have babies.

If we are serious about women’s representation and about celebrating the legacy of those fearless women who so vociferously fought for our right to stand here today, we must do our bit to ensure that those who wish to stand here do not face the barriers that many of us have had to. Ninety years ago, working women like my grandmother and great-aunts and their peers who served, cooked and laundered for the local landowners got to have their say. Our job here is to speak for those who are still not here but need to be, and to hold the doors of Parliament wide open to welcome them in to take their rightful place beside us.

3.12 pm

Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Ms Buck, and to speak under your chairmanship. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate and giving us all the opportunity to talk about this issue today. She treated us to a really excellent
It is true that Sylvia Pankhurst’s socialist convictions were important to the movement but, as she recognised herself, it was the working-class women who were key. She said that working-class women were: “not merely the argument of more fortunate people, but...fighters on their own account, despising mere platitudes...and demanding for themselves and their families a full share of the benefits of civilisation and progress.”

She was proved right. After she had been imprisoned and was weak from force-feeding, it was the women of the east of London who offered her protection.

**Jo Stevens:** Does my hon. Friend share my view that although it is brilliant to see the statue of Millicent Fawcett in Parliament Square, it would be as good to see a statue of Sylvia on Clerkenwell Green?

**Lyn Brown:** I certainly do, and perhaps we could do something about the Payne family, who took Sylvia in when she was weak. The Payne family came from Old Ford, which is kind of Hackney, kind of Tower Hamlets, and kind of Stratford—so that makes it mine—and they were shoemakers. Police officers tried to surround the house that Sylvia was in, but they were confronted by really strong women who simply stood firm and refused to move. Special branch officers attempted to bribe the women to withdraw and to allow them to use their rooms for surveillance. They offered decent money, but every single woman and family, I am proud to say, stood firm and refused to accept the bribes. They refused to move. I believe that, if the East London Federation had not put working-class women first, the anniversary that we are celebrating today would have taken much longer to achieve.

Those women stood on the shoulders of the match women who went on strike. They were from the same area and of the same stock. History is clear: the match women’s success in organising for themselves and fighting for their rights inspired London’s east end dockers to do the same. Those women were the wives, daughters, sisters and mothers of the dockers who went on strike the year after. The match women did not plead for inclusion in the labour movement, because they created it. They organised, fought and won against massive odds. They were instrumental in founding a political labour movement that continues to fight for fair pay and conditions for all Britain’s workers today.

I am happy that people know about those events through the wonderful work of the amazing historian Dr Louise Raw, whose sixth successful annual match women’s festival took place last Saturday. Louise and I have been campaigning for a proper memorial for the match women at the Bryant and May factory site in Bow where they worked. Progress is slow, but I am glad to tell the sisters present—and the brothers—that I reckon we will make it within the next 12 months. We have strong support from residents, historians and activists.

We are making some progress with recognition of our history as working-class women. However, Members will agree that we have a way to go, because in the east of London we have a Jack the Ripper museum that glamorises misogynist murders and turns the working-class women victims into mere props. At the same time, one of the victims, Annie Chapman, is buried in a pauper’s grave in Newham, and one of the match women’s leaders, Sarah Chapman—no relation, as it happens—is
buried just a few metres away. Those are the stories that we need to tell and remember. Those are the people we need to memorialise—not a sad, sick man.

Why do we have a Jack the Ripper museum? The building was originally supposed to be a celebration of east end women but, according to newspaper reports, the developers lied. The travesty of the Ripper museum in Cable Street, of all places, may have a positive outcome yet, because the campaign for an east end women’s museum is stronger than ever. The campaigners aim to secure a permanent home for their exhibitions, which they expect to open in 2020. They are still talking about putting the museum in Barking—but I still have my dreams.

Learning about our history is important, because unless we know where we come from and who we are, it is hard to know where we can go. The history we talk about today can play a part in inspiring a new generation. Remembering our past helps us to understand our present and imagine our future. If more people knew about the true contribution of working-class women to the suffrage and labour movements, and the rights and prosperity in this society today, they would be less likely to overlook the amazing women who do that same work now. The potential that my working-class sisters have is enormous. They need the recognition and the space to achieve it.

3.24 pm

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for securing the debate. She is a woman I am proud of, as I know many Members are.

It is vital in such a debate not only to celebrate the achievement of the 1928 Act, but to remember the stories of the women and fighters who campaigned for it and who won the battle for electoral reform, suffrage and equality. It is 100 years since some women got the right to vote—not all of them, but some. It was a good step forward. People often get confused between the different Representation of the People Acts. Were it not for the fantastic Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall, it would be easy for Members of Parliament, too, to be confused about when each piece of legislation was passed, and what it meant.

In 1918 the vote was given to some women—only those at the top of society. The 1928 Act gave the vote to all women over 21, rather than those over 30 who were landowners. That was a huge step forward, and it meant that 52.5% of the electorate in the 1929 general election were women. That was transformative. The fact that it took 10 years—two whole Parliaments—fully to extend the franchise shows just how scared the establishment was of giving proper representation to women and the working class across the UK.

I pay tribute to the incredible campaigners who continued to make the case for the legislation. Many gave up their freedom, faced imprisonment or went on hunger strikes. Many, such as Emily Davison, gave their lives for the cause, but the campaigners never gave up. They are an inspiration to all of us in this House and we pledge ourselves to further their cause. The story is often overlooked.

In Plymouth we are proud to be part of the suffragette story, and of the fact that the suffragette movement there was not just one of rich women campaigning for the vote. The women took things into their own hands. Members may be familiar with the beautiful Smeaton’s Tower on Plymouth Hoe. That lighthouse still stands proudly, but the suffragettes put a bomb in it and tried to blow it up. They wanted to attract attention to their cause. I am glad that the lighthouse still stands, but the story of how local women in Plymouth resorted to those means to try to gain attention and credibility for their cause should continue to be talked about.

I want to talk now about Nancy Astor. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury said, the story of how we reached the point where only a third of our Parliament are women started with Nancy Astor taking her seat in 1919. She represented Plymouth Sutton and was introduced to the House of Commons flanked by Balfour and Lloyd George. It will be the 100th anniversary of her election—and of Plymouth’s voting for a woman—in November 2019. She and I would disagree fundamentally on nearly everything. She stood for many things that I could not stomach, countenance or go along with, and I am sure that that would be the case for nearly every Member. We would not share her views on slavery, anti-Semitism, fascism and LGBT equality, but her story, the fact that she was the first woman to take her seat in this place, and the fact that Plymouth was the first place to elect a woman who took her seat means we are intimately entwined in the story, which we must keep telling.

There are far too many girls and young women in schools in Plymouth and across the country who do not know about Nancy Astor. I do not want her political views to be advocated; I want the story of brave women, many of them standing alone, doing brave things and pushing the boundaries for women in general. She was initially known as the Member of Parliament for women, and we should talk about her role. There should be debate about the good and bad sides of all politicians. The first step that she took is important. It may seem odd for me as a Labour MP to speak here about a Conservative MP—especially one I fundamentally disagree with—but we need to tell the story. It frustrates me that the story of women in our politics is not told. We hear about men, and occasionally about the women standing behind them. We need to break that, and we can do so only when we—men in particular—start to tell the story. We cannot leave it to women to tell the story of women in politics. It is for all Members of Parliament, male and female, to talk up the role of women in Parliament.

Mr Dhesi: My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As to women pushing boundaries, does he agree that women, and especially those from ethnic minorities, are often not given much credit for their accomplishments? The first black lady mayor in the country, Lydia Simmons, was elected in Slough. She was an inspiration for many, yet often such individuals do not get the credit they deserve.

Luke Pollard: My hon. Friend has proved my point precisely that we need male MPs speaking up as well as female MPs, and I thank him for taking the advice so quickly.

I recently visited the superb Voice & Vote exhibition in Westminster Hall. I pay tribute to the House authorities for putting it on. It really is a superb exhibition, and
hon. Members who have not visited need to take the time to do so. They will notice that one exhibit is Nancy Astor’s dress, on loan from Plymouth museum. She picked the dress because it looked like a man’s suit; it looks like a double-breasted suit. Beside it is a little plaque explaining that she chose it because she wanted people to judge her by what she said and not for what she wore. It is therefore somewhat ironic that 99 years later I stand here, as one of her successors, talking about her dress and disagreeing with all her words, but perhaps those are the joys of democracy.

Parliament was a very different place when Nancy Astor became a Member. Voice & Vote tells us the story of a system that did not welcome women to Parliament. It did not afford them the equality and credibility that they deserved by virtue of their election. We can see that in the fact that in 1929 there was only one coat hook in the Lady Members’ Room for eight female MPs. That was simply unacceptable. However, there is still far too much that the women at that time, Nancy Astor included, were fighting for that we are still fighting for today.

Nancy Astor was not afraid to stand up for herself as a woman, even in the face of power. She had an incredibly canny sense of humour, and people who have spent time in Plymouth will know many stories about her. I will touch on just a few. In particular, I want to touch on her relationship with Winston Churchill. Many hon. Members will know one story about it, but there were so many glorious clashes between them. Apparently, Churchill once told Nancy Astor that having a woman in Parliament was like having one intrude on him in the bathroom, to which she retorted, “You’re not handsome enough to have such fears.” She is also said to have responded to a question from Churchill about what disguise he should wear to a masquerade ball by saying, “Why don’t you come sober, Prime Minister?” But perhaps the most famous exchange, which I am sure all hon. Members will know of, is the one in which Nancy Astor said, “Mr. Churchill, if you were my husband, I would poison your tea,” to which Churchill replied, “Madam, if you were my wife, I would drink it.”

So many stories are told about Nancy Astor, but so few are told about many of the other fantastic female MPs for Plymouth. I want to single out Lucy Middleton, who was the MP from 1945 to 1951 and a real tower of strength in the trade union movement. She is not remembered enough by my party in Plymouth, or by all of us here. Sadly, she lost her seat, to a male member of Parliament they see pictures of people who look like them. Let us also ensure that there is not just male and female representation. Let us ensure that we have on our walls LGBT heroes, black, Asian and minority ethnic heroes, and disabled heroes. This place looks far too much like the old stale white male club that it sometimes was in the past.

We can change that. We need to do it by speaking up about equality. We need to continue to be restless about it to ensure that we keep fighting the misogyny that we see in our politics, in our parties and in our society. We need to give a voice to the single parents, to the WASPI women and to those people who are standing up for equality and want a fair day’s pay for a fair day’s work. That is what we all need to do. We can all do our bit to ensure that we get there by telling the story of women in politics, and the 1928 Act is a really important part of that. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury still being in this place in 10 years’ time to lead the debate on the 100th anniversary of that Act.

As a campaigner for women’s suffrage, Margaret was part of a broader labour movement with other working-class suffragettes, fighting for all women to have equal rights with men. This year, of course, marks 90 years of the equal franchise, but it is also the centenary of the unequal franchise for women—that is probably what we should call it. Ten years previously, the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed to give middle-class and upper-class women the vote. For Margaret and the millions of other working-class women, that meant one rule for the rich and another for the poor. A third of the least well-off women could not vote.

We cannot look at gender separately from class. The fight for suffrage and equality is a difficult journey. Margaret, after years of condemnation and even imprisonment because of trade union activities, understood that the struggles of unionisation and feminism went hand in hand. Let us be clear: it is thanks to the many sacrifices made by Margaret and fellow suffragettes that the struggle for gender equality has been transformed into law. Change can happen only when ordinary people organise together to fight to shape their future. We must remember those women who fought to shape their future, and in doing so helped others. We cannot forget either those who stood in solidarity with the suffragettes. Of course, male Labour MPs such as Keir Hardie and George Lansbury resigned their positions and faced imprisonment on this issue as well.

The struggle for gender equality has not yet been won elsewhere in the world, and sometimes the fight takes place vociferously on the streets as well as in parliamentary
chambers. Earlier this year, I went to northern Syria, where I met the People’s Protection Units, the YPG, and the YPJ, the Women’s Protection Units, of the Kurdish fighters. They are not only fighting the Islamic State in the middle east, but building a feminist revolution, in which all positions are held jointly by women and men. Women hold 50% of all the positions in their organisation—that is better than we do in the UK. There is still a lot to learn. We must remember and show solidarity with the YPJ fighters and other feminist fighters around the world. Those women take up not only the torch against persecution and disenfranchisement, but the fight for a global humanity and against the fascism of ISIS. They remind us that each battle takes us a step closer to equality.

This year, of course, we have seen erected in Parliament Square the statue of Millicent Fawcett, who lived in Brighton and whose husband was the first non-Conservative Member of Parliament in Brighton. On the plinth are 58 names, but there are many more names that we must remember. Today, however, some of their greatest achievements of progress are being rolled back—progress not just for women, but for those with disabilities, LGBT people and BAME people. Severe cuts have landed disproportionately on women and ethnic minorities. Since 2010, 86% of the money raised from Conservative tax and social security changes has come straight out of women’s pockets. And of course the introduction of voter ID harms working-class women of colour the most.

The Young Women’s Trust found that young women are especially likely to be on low pay and in insecure jobs. One sixth of young women have been on less than the minimum wage, and almost half are worried about job security. The Office for National Statistics says that half a million young women are workless. Despite most wanting jobs, they cannot afford to work because of lack of childcare, direct discrimination, and lack of support to find jobs.

We cannot stop fighting for women, especially when, I believe, this Government are not doing enough; nor can we ignore the central role of working people in demanding social change. These rights are hard-won not by asking nicely, but by feminists’ and working class people’s continued commitment to equality. A campaign of equality will always find its home in the Labour movement.

When Margaret Bondfield and fellow suffragettes joined the labour movement to fight for equality, they found a home in the Labour party. Sewing machinists such as Rose Boland and Sheila Douglas, who fought for what became the Equal Pay Act 1970, found their home in the Labour party. On the plinth are names, but there are many more names that we must remember. Today, however, some of their greatest achievements of progress are being rolled back—progress not just for women, but for those with disabilities, LGBT people and BAME people. Severe cuts have landed disproportionately on women and ethnic minorities. Since 2010, 86% of the money raised from Conservative tax and social security changes has come straight out of women’s pockets. And of course the introduction of voter ID harms working-class women of colour the most.

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When Margaret Bondfield and fellow suffragettes joined the labour movement to fight for equality, they found a home in the Labour party. Sewing machinists such as Rose Boland and Sheila Douglas, who fought for what became the Equal Pay Act 1970, found their home in the Labour party. Today, women make up half of our shadow Cabinet. A third of Labour Members are women—more than any other political party. Labour has always led the way in guaranteeing women’s representation through our party structures, but it still needs to do more internally, and I think other parties do, too.

We will always welcome those demanding social change for what they believe in. Equality fighters will always have a home in the Labour party. In Brighton we have a campaign to commemorate Liberal and Labour party women on blue plaques around our city this year. We hope to have a statue of the first suffragette to die, who was from Brighton, erected in Brighton. I believe every town should have a statue of a woman, because, as my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) said, there are far too many representations of men, not only in Parliament, but in our communities. Those struggles and fights will have a home in the Labour party. I hope that local Labour parties and other parties will fight for that across the country.

3.41 pm

Tommy Sheppard (Edinburgh East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Buck. I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) for bringing this debate to the House and giving me the opportunity to speak on the subject today.

We have spent a lot of time this year marking the anniversaries of universal suffrage. Every time I think about this, what I find remarkable is not how long ago it was, but how recent. The beginning of the 20th century was an age of modernity—there were motorcars, aeroplanes, radios and televisions; there were new advances in thinking in science and technology; there was an avant-garde movement in the arts, architecture and music. Yet while all that was happening, half—in fact, more than half—of our population were denied the basic political rights given to the other half. On reflection, that is a monstrous injustice, and the fact that it could have existed for so long while our modern constitution was being shaped is a source of great shame, and a black mark on our collective history.

Universal suffrage had been a long time coming when it happened. I have spent some time recently looking at the political agitation of the late 18th century, from Thomas Muir in Scotland to Thomas Paine here and Wolfe Tone in Ireland. They were agitating for universal suffrage—basic political suffrage—in an age when there was none. The role of women was alive and present in those debates. Since we have time, I want to read for the record the opening lines of a poem by Robert Burns, written in 1792:

“While Europe’s eye is fix’d on mighty things,
The fate of Empires and the fall of Kings;
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;
Amid this mighty fuss just let me mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.”

That shows that in 1792 there was a live discussion about the political rights distributed among men and women.

The exhibition just outside this Chamber in Westminster Hall shows that throughout the 19th century there was agitation, in the Reform Acts of the 1830s and driving on throughout that century. People were asking for reforms for a very long time. It is hard to imagine now the political organisation of men in this country and the degree to which that patriarchy practised misogyny and exclusion. It is quite phenomenal that it took so long—decades and generations—for these most basic of reforms to be achieved.

Having the right to vote is an end in itself, but increasing the franchise and bringing women into the electorate and then into Parliament achieved many other great ends. In particular, it overcame much exclusion, inequality and discrimination that pervaded every aspect of social policy. Even in the period 1918 to 1939, there were many advances in social and economic legislation, to the betterment of women and our society, and the task continues today. It is sad that we have to admit this,
but it is a fact that there is a correlation between the involvement of women in the rules that govern our society and the effect those rules have on sexual inequality.

I hope we are nearing the end of this process. I hope we are getting to a situation where we have genuine equality and where our public policy is genuinely equal, but as colleagues have said, we are still at it. Government policy today still has a worse effect on women in our society than on men. The welfare cuts fall mainly on women. The rape clause means that women now have to prove that they have been raped to get child benefit for their third child. The WASPI inequality—I think that all of us would agree that men and women should have equal pension rights—was brought in in a ham-fisted way. The denial and breaking of an obligation and guarantee given to so many born in the 1950s is a monstrous act of Government policy. Those things are still with us today.

Luke Pollard: The mistakes made with the WASPI women—not informing people about changes—are still happening today with the change in universal credit. If women transitioning with their families onto universal credit have more than two children, they are not being told that they will lose the benefit after the two-child cut-off. The opportunity of WASPI is to learn the lessons and to help women with three children especially to understand that cuts are coming for them. That is not being done by Government at the moment.

Tommy Sheppard: Indeed. It would probably be unfair to expect the Cabinet Office Minister to respond to that point on behalf of the Government, but perhaps she will commit to take it back to discuss with colleagues.

It would be remiss of me to speak on behalf of the Scottish National party without saying something about the many great women who have contributed much to the politics not just of Scotland but of the United Kingdom as a whole. I shall mention only three: in 1967 Winnie Ewing tore the establishment apart by winning the Hamilton by-election, surprising everyone in British politics and beginning 51 years of unbroken representation by my party in this place; in the following decade Margo MacDonald did the same in not one but two by-elections, upturning the political firmament and in many ways creating the conditions that have led to the modern political dynamic in Scotland now; and of course Nicola Sturgeon, our First Minister in Scotland, who has been a beacon, an inspiration and a role model for young women in Scotland and throughout Europe and the modern world.

Nicola Sturgeon presides over one of the few Cabinets among Governments that is gender-balanced, made up half of women and half of men. It has been praised as a role model by the United Nations. The Scottish Government are also moving forward in many other respects to improve the representation of women in public life, setting targets and quotas for representation in our public board rooms, hoping to encourage the private sector to follow suit.

There has been a big debate about quotas—whether they are a right and proper thing and whether they genuinely advance women or are in some ways unnecessary or patronising to women. My experience is clear: quotas are a way of breaking the inertia and stasis that surround the existing system. It is a way of asking and answering a question about whether women are capable of doing the job. When given the chance, they are not just capable but in my view more capable than their male counterparts. That is the experience of the Scottish Government in action, which the rest of the United Kingdom might choose to learn from.

Jo Stevens: The Labour party has the highest proportion of female MPs, which has been achieved through all-women shortlists—a mechanism that was put in place to make that change. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that similar mechanisms should be put in place across all political parties?

Tommy Sheppard: Yes. I am not saying that we should necessarily copy the Labour party rulebook, but a similar objective and similar mechanisms should certainly be put in place. We have something similar in my party, although not for every seat. Many seats that we do not hold are designated as all-women shortlists so a female candidate is selected. In Scotland, that has resulted in 43% of the governing party, my party, being women—still not 50%, but further forward than many other parties can boast of. Those policies have obsolescence built in, because once they have achieved the desired effect, they are no longer necessary.

As we reflect on the 90th anniversary of universal suffrage and the 100th anniversary of the beginning of votes for women, we should also consider what we can do across the globe as an international player. In many countries, the rights of women resemble what they were in this country 90 years or 100 years ago. That needs to be built into our foreign policy much more—again, I do not expect the Cabinet Minister to respond to that—so that our relationship with other countries is conditioned and qualified by the way in which they treat their citizens and particularly women in their societies. We should not have beneficial relations, roll out the red carpet or sign arms deals, or whatever, with countries that manifestly practise discrimination within their own borders. That would bring long-overdue principle into politics and Government policy and, as we look forward on this anniversary, it would be a practical contribution that we could make to celebrate the gains already made and recognise how much still needs to be done throughout the world.

3.52 pm

Dawn Butler (Brent Central) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairship, Ms Buck. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) on securing this important debate. It has been great to listen to all these names, which are now in Hansard in perpetuity, and know that we have done our bit to recognise working-class women who have been, and are still, often ignored.

In history, working-class women, the poorer suffragettes, were referred to as “women quite unknown”. My hon. Friend mentioned how few opportunities there were for working-class women. She talked about inequality and the gender pay gap, and the way that they are still poorer female citizens. She also mentioned 50:50 Parliament, which we campaign on with Frances Scott, who is here today. We need to ensure that upskirting and revenge porn become sexual offences so that women who suffer do not have to make themselves publicly known.
How can we achieve all that in this day and age? We can all play our part. We can use inclusion riders, like actors who say, “I will not star in a film if it does not involve diversity in its pipeline and creation.” We have also talked about various sections of the Equality Act 2010. I hope that when the Minister responds, she might be tempted to announce that the Government will enact section 1 of the Act, which would force public bodies to take into account socioeconomic disadvantage when making policy decisions. If we had more consideration of that when policies were being developed, we would see fewer policies like the third-child policy, and fewer policies like those under which 86% of cuts fall on the shoulders of women and black, Asian and minority ethnic women suffer more than any other group.

My hon. Friend also mentioned my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford West (Naz Shah), who is recovering. The proxy vote debate, which was supposed to be today, has been postponed. I had hoped that all the women MPs who were ready and poised to speak would come to this debate to at least listen or even make their speeches, because then they would not have been wasted.

There were many great contributions to the debate, and I will touch on a few. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) flew the flag for working-class women, the different types of women and the strength of east London women, which I can obviously attest to. She gave a voice to the match women and talked about the leaders of those times, who were buried in paupers’ graves after all their struggles.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) talked about Nancy Astor and how we have to talk about the journeys of women, even those we disagree with. Of course, I often talk about women I disagree with and the policies they make. Their story deserves to be told, just like everybody else’s. It is important that we stand up for other people’s rights. Let us imagine how quickly we would move towards equality if all men spoke about the rights of women, all white people spoke about the equality of black people, and all straight people spoke about LGBT+ people. We must all play our part in speaking up for equality, because we all play a part in each other’s journey. As Martin Luther King said:

“I cannot be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. This is the interrelated structure of reality.”

My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Lloyd Russell-Moyle) spoke about Margaret Bondfield, the first female Minister under Labour, which made me think about all the firsts that Labour has achieved. I would like to read them out, but there are so many that it would take at least an hour, and I do not have that much time. Some of them are to be celebrated: we have had the first black female MP, the first lesbian Minister and the first black female Minister—that is me. There are also some sad firsts, such as Maureen Colquhoun, a Labour MP who was born in 1928, who was gay andfout by the Daily Mail, which still happens today. Newspapers still think that that is okay, which shows how far we have to go.

We also heard some great interventions about 1950s women. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, for wearing the colours of the suffragettes in his turban. He talked about Sophia Duleep Singh and the hidden histories that have been ignored or forgotten, which this debate has shined a light on.

Poorer women were treated worse than middle-class women. They were treated more brutally by the police, prison wardens and magistrates. As I said, I am pleased that we are recognising them. To remember them and their struggle is to remember our own struggle and to adopt their struggle as our own.

As has been said, alongside the growing women’s suffrage movement was the women’s labour movement, which included groups such as the Women’s Protective and Provident League, the Co-operative Women’s Guild, the Women’s Trade Union Association and women in the young Independent Labour party, which would probably be known as Momentum today. Those women were referred to as “radical suffragists”. I cannot see what was radical about them, apart from wanting equality. However, those “radical suffragists” included people such as Sarah Reddish, Ada Nield Chew, Helen Silcock and Selina Cooper. Those women mobilised other women in the trade union movement—in fact, they mobilised almost 30,000 people to sign a suffrage petition, and that was without the internet, Twitter, Facebook, mobile phones and WhatsApp.

Ada Nield Chew said that if the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies’ request had been granted in 1884, “the entire class of wealthy women would be enfranchised”, but, as she added, “the great body of working women, married or single, would be voteless still”.

That message rings true with me. The radical suffragists, as they were known, began to move away from the NUWSS, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham spoke about. That reminded me of something that I did recently. I was a member of a women’s WhatsApp group, but I became so frustrated with trying to get members of that group to understand and consider the intersectionality of women that in the end I left the group, and I was not the only one to do so. It did not feel radical to leave that group; it obviously just entailed the click of a button. However, it reminded me of those powerful working-class women and it made me realise that the fight for recognition of, and equality for, all women is a constant struggle.

We have to talk about it and fight for it constantly, otherwise we will be dragged backwards. That is really a stark realisation, because I would have hoped that we would have progressed.

I cannot confirm or deny whether I joined a new radical women’s WhatsApp group, but those working-class women broke away and formed “Womanhood Suffrage”, or the Women’s Social and Political Union. The WSPU’s strapline and objective was:

“A vote for every adult woman, regardless of whether she owned property.”

When working-class women fight, they fight for everybody; they do not just fight for a select group. That is a lesson that truly still needs to be learned in some feminist circles. What those women were fighting for sounds really simple now; it does not sound radical to me at all. As my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury asked, if all women had received the vote earlier, how far towards equality would we be now? We might not even be having this debate.

As we have heard, the first march was from east London, and it included trade unionists such as Minnie Baldock, Sylvia Pankhurst and Dora Montefiore, who were working-class women using their non-working day
Dawn Butler: How amazing would it be to walk around different parts of London and the country, and see statues of women, and learn about their history, and know that we have made that happen? People always bang on about Britain having had two female Prime Ministers. Well, we have a female Prime Minister—I am not saying that I want statues of the female Prime Minister going up all around the place, but I am saying that the female Prime Minister can make the decision. She can say, “Right, I will give the money for this to happen, so that we can embrace our rich and colourful and socialist history”, because our job is to give a voice to the voiceless and to uncover the hidden stories. Should I have missed out the word “socialist” there? [Laughter.] Our job is to put a name to “A.N. Other” and to “Anonymous”, to ensure that history becomes herstory, and that herstory paints a true picture of a moment in time.

Working-class women fought for all women, so when women of today fight for the select, privileged few, I find it hard to refer to them as feminists, and when they use their voice to amplify their privilege and ignore the cries of the less fortunate, I find it hard to support the cause wholeheartedly. I hope that in time people will use their power and privilege for progress. People often talk about the legacy that they will leave behind; I think that we need to talk about the foundation that we will leave behind. Women who are on the ladder of success should leave behind them the foundation for an escalator, and the women who are on the escalator of success should leave behind them the foundation for a lift, so that those women who come behind us get to that destination, quicker and more smoothly.

4.9 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): May I say how pleased I am to have you presiding over us today, Ms Buck? I will make a few remarks before ensuring that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Rosie Duffield) can wrap up the debate. I begin by thanking her for bringing forward this debate on the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928. I am delighted to play my part in recognising that milestone. I will set out some of the work that the Government are undertaking to mark the anniversary and our plans for ensuring that all citizens feel empowered to be part of democracy as we enjoy it in this country.
Jo Stevens: Will the Minister give way?

Chloe Smith: Perhaps the hon. Lady should give me a chance to get started, but go on—make it good.

Jo Stevens: The Minister specifically mentioned allowing people to participate in democracy. Would it not be a wonderful thing on this anniversary to give 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote?

Chloe Smith: The hon. Lady will need to wait for another 90 minutes in another Westminster Hall debate for the full discussion on that.

I thank the hon. Member for Canterbury for her commitment to equality for all members of our society. I am aware of the work she does with the 50:50 Parliament campaign, and I pay tribute to it. I am glad she shares my view and the Government’s view that no one in our society is more important than anyone else. Every individual, no matter their gender or background, has an equal role and, in relation to my particular brief, an equal right to vote.

As a fellow female parliamentarian, it is important to acknowledge the efforts of the brilliant women who paved the way for us to be here today. I thank the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) for beginning the Back-Bench contributions with an exposition of the history that is at play here. It is important to think about the past as we consider our present and our future. Without the tireless efforts of those women and the men who championed their cause, perhaps most of us in this room would not have a voice in society, let alone in this place. I am proud to be part of the present, when we have the most diverse Parliament in British history, but there is a lot more to do.

We all welcome such initiatives as the 50:50 campaign, the #AskHerToStand campaign and Parliament’s own Vote 100 project, which make the goal of gender balance a long-needed reality. I thank the hon. Member for Edinburgh East (Tommy Sheppard) for reminding us that progress needs to be encouraged and supported internationally.

This week is National Democracy Week, which has been timed to coincide with Monday’s important anniversary. Many of the events happening up and down the country will be highlighting the role played by those who fought for equal voting rights, which included women from a diverse range of backgrounds. Our goal in running National Democracy Week has been to reach out to citizens from all backgrounds, especially those from groups less likely to be registered to vote. I am very passionate about that.

I understand, respect and acknowledge the arguments that have been made today about the difference between 1918 and 1928. In this year of suffrage, which encompasses both those anniversaries, it is valid and important that we test those concepts and have that debate. I would like to acknowledge that in my remarks.

The Equal Franchise Act 1928, which is what we are here to discuss, is as significant today as it was then. It cemented in law that no matter whether someone was a woman or a man, they had the right to vote on equal terms. We are celebrating that 90th anniversary in a number of ways, including the National Democracy Week awards, which were held in Manchester on Monday. They kicked off the week and were a fantastic way of recognising the exceptional work of individuals and organisations helping others to be involved in democracy. Just today, a “Women in Politics Hackathon”, supported by the Leader of the House and run by Shout Out UK, brought girls and young women to Parliament to work on creative ideas to get more women into politics.

This year the Government Equalities Office has provided £1.5 million for the women’s vote centenary grant scheme, which has already provided funds to 140 projects across the country. As a Minister at the Cabinet Office, I am delivering projects under the “Educate” theme of the suffrage centenary programme. The projects are being developed to increase knowledge of UK democracy and its importance among young people in particular, but not exclusively. It includes those from ethnic minorities and under-registered groups, so as to widen democratic participation.

Increasing participation has been facilitated by the Government’s commitment to making registering to vote more straightforward than ever before. In 2014 we introduced individual electoral registration alongside a digital service, and as a result we have seen record numbers on our electoral register, which reached 46.8 million people before the 2017 general election. I wonder what that might have looked like to someone looking ahead from 1928.

We are committed to making the service more accessible. For example, I am pleased to say that we are working with Mencap on an easy-read guide. Historically—I say this as a passing point of interest—figures suggest that women have been more likely to be registered to vote than men, with recent research on completeness of registers suggesting a 2% difference in the rates for women and men.

Last December, the Government published their democratic engagement plan, which sets out the ways in which we will tackle further barriers to democratic inclusion. I was pleased that the hon. Member for Canterbury widened her argument at the start and set the tone for the debate, because in many ways the issue goes beyond just gender. That gives me the chance to note that we have set up an accessibility of elections working group, through which we are working on how we can make our registration and electoral systems and processes as smooth and secure as possible for people with specific conditions or disabilities.

The hon. Member for Slough (Mr Dhesi), who is no longer in his place, was right to reassure people that our recent changes to the anonymous registration system have made it easier for victims of domestic abuse to register to vote while protecting their right to remain anonymous. Those changes, which of course were welcomed by Women’s Aid and many others, will make it easier for an estimated 12,000 survivors of domestic abuse to register to vote without their name or address appearing on the roll and without the fear of former partners finding their address. I would like the message to go out loud and clear that that has been done, and I hope it is already making victims’ lives easier.

I was struck by some of the words the hon. Member for Canterbury used about the grotesque abuse that may follow her introducing the debate. She was right to draw that point out. I will shortly launch a consultation on intimidation in public life, which, as the Committee on Standards in Public Life noted, is directed disproportionately at female candidates for public service.
I hope we can work together to improve the way our electoral law protects debate and welcomes everyone into democracy.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) reminded us in his helpful remarks outlining the life and times of Nancy Astor that we should respect difference. I am delighted that hon. Members spoke so well about their political traditions, and I shall take the licence the hon. Gentleman offered me to speak about mine. I remind hon. Members that the first woman to sit in the House of Commons was indeed that Conservative, Nancy Astor, and we were the first party in the western world to elect a female Prime Minister. Here we are on our second, while the party in opposition is yet to have a female leader.

Dawn Butler rose—

Chloe Smith: Is the hon. Lady the next leader of the Labour party? I hope so.

Dawn Butler: I am not, but let me correct the Minister. We have not had a female Prime Minister, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) was a female leader of the Labour party.

Chloe Smith: I am happy to stand corrected, but I still raise the hon. Lady. Lady two Prime Ministers to one Leader of the Opposition. I also raise her the Prime Minister who passed the Equal Franchise Act 1928—the Conservative Stanley Baldwin—and pay credit to Emmeline Pankhurst, who, had she not passed away before the election, would have contested a parliamentary seat for the Conservative party.

Turning to other matters in women’s lives, under this Conservative Government there are more women in work than ever before. The female employment rate is at a record high of 70.9%. Under the last Labour Government, female unemployment rose by 25%. Let us not forget that that represents nearly 1 million women. We are encouraging all companies to do more to eliminate the gender pay gap by publishing their data, improving their pipeline to ensure progress on female representation at senior levels, and making flexible working a reality for all employees. We introduced shared parental leave—my husband and I took it ourselves, and we agree that it is extremely important. I would love to see others taking it up as well.

Other political points were made that neglected to give the entire picture, so let me make a few more economic points before concluding. In Government, we have introduced tax-free childcare, providing working families with up to £2,000 per child per year. We have introduced universal credit, and increased support to 85% of childcare costs, 15 hours of free childcare a week for families with disadvantaged two-year-olds, and an additional 15 hours of free childcare every week to working parents of three and four-year-olds. We will be investing around £6 billion in childcare every year by 2020—more than ever before. That is the Conservative reality.

Furthermore, the increase in the national living wage in April from £7.50 to £7.83, with more to come, represents an increase in a full-time minimum wage worker’s annual earnings of more than £600. We all know that a higher proportion of women than men are expected to benefit from that increase, so there is no glass ceiling in the Government’s approach to improving the lives of all women in society. We practise what we preach—improving female representation and creating equal opportunities in the workplace.

I will leave time for the hon. Member for Canterbury to wind up. I thank her again for securing the debate on this important anniversary. We should use such opportunities to promote participation and work together, combining our traditions and interests and coming together to use our powerful positions in this place to deliver a democracy that is more accessible, inclusive and representative.

Rosie Duffield: Thank you, Ms Buck, for allowing me to lead today’s debate and for chairing it so brilliantly. I thank all hon. Members who stayed here on a horrible hot Thursday afternoon instead of going back to their constituencies. It is great to hear the Minister pledge to do so much for democracy, and to hear about the Government’s plans. Obviously Opposition Members will keep a close eye on those things.

I thank all Members who made contributions. I have learned a lot about the east end women. I share the view of my hon. Friend. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) that the Jack the Ripper museum is abhorrent. I cannot wait for us to find a space where we can celebrate the lives of the east end women permanently, rather than having to shift about all the time. It would be nice to have the money behind that that this horrible other place seems to have.

Dawn Butler: Does my hon. Friend have any comments about women who are on zero-hours contracts, the gig economy and the rise in women among the working poor?

Rosie Duffield: Absolutely. Under the last Labour Government I was able to work and bring up my children as a single mum. Without tax credits, I would have had no hope. I would have been living with my parents, with my children in one room, unable to feed them easily. The last Labour Government made the lives of women a lot easier, a lot better, and introduced childcare and all sorts of things that get forgotten and overlooked. Yes, a lot more people are in work, but a lot of them are working for companies such as Deliveroo and McDonald’s on a very low wage. The childcare issue is a huge and growing problem, and nurseries are having to close.

It is worth saying that there is not equality. Working women are still the working poor, as the shadow Minister just mentioned. Zero-hours contracts do not help anybody, so there is still much to do to get equality. As some Members have said, we also must not forget our sisters around the world. Although we think we have done equality and feminism, we have not. We need to keep going, look around us, and do as much as we can for everyone.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act 1928.

Sitting adjourned.
Family Visitor Visas

4.30 pm  

Helen Jones (Warrington North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered e-petitions 206568, 210497 and 201416 relating to family visitor visas.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I congratulate you on the honour you received in the recent honours list; it was well-deserved.

All the e-petitions we are considering deal with visitor visas for families, and we have grouped them together for that reason. There seem to be particular problems with families getting visitor visas for their relatives. Before I move on to that, I want to state the obvious for the record: every state has the right to control its borders. No one is asking for a free-for-all or for those who abuse the system to get away with it. However, people overwhelmingly want a system that is fair to people already in this country and to their visitors and that is fairly administered, with some compassion and common sense. From the public engagement we have done—I will refer to that later—that often seems not to be the case.

I must confess that I came to this issue as a bit of a novice; depending on the point of view, it is either an advantage or a drawback of the Petitions Committee that we often have to learn a new subject very quickly. I do not represent a constituency where many people have relatives abroad, so I thought that the few cases I had seen where people could not get someone in for a wedding or funeral represented blips in the system. However, having looked at the matter in some detail and talked to our petitioners—I am very grateful to those who have engaged with us—I am convinced that there are serious problems with family visitor visas when it comes to the quality of decision making and how it is communicated to applicants.

We all accept that clearance officers have a difficult job to do. There are a number of things they need to consider when deciding whether to grant a visa, including people’s previous immigration history, their financial position, their economic and personal ties to their own country, and whether they have been here so often that it constitutes de facto residence. Some of those things are clearly factual, while others require the exercise of judgment.

For example, when someone is applying from a country that is unstable or in a conflict zone, officers can look at the statistics for immigration compliance in that region. However, they are also told that if someone is applying from a country in conflict or where part of the country is in conflict, that “can be sufficient reason for you not to be satisfied that the applicant is a genuine visitor”, unless the applicant can produce evidence to show that that is not the case. One of the things cited as an example is where they have right of residence in a third country, which does not apply to many people. It is very difficult for an applicant to rebut that presumption, and we are in danger of judging people on where they come from, rather than their personal circumstances.

Officers can look at someone’s previous history to see whether they or their sponsor have attempted to deceive the immigration authorities in the past, and that is perfectly right, but they can also refuse an application when:

“It has not been possible to verify information provided by the applicant despite attempts to do so”.

I would have no problem with that if I was convinced that we were getting the quality of the decision making right in the first instance, but I do not think that is always the case.

In 2011, the chief inspector of borders and immigration looked at the New York visa section. One would not think that was a particularly difficult area, but he found that 26% of the cases did not meet the quality markers for decision making. Officers were often misinterpreting documents and were making inconsistent decisions. Although his 2012 report showed some improvement, he said there was a long way to go. In his 2014 report, he looked at various visa sections and found that 30% of decisions did not meet the quality markers. Again, officers were making very inconsistent decisions.

It is not surprising, then, that a number of cases have been raised of late in the press and by Members of this House. In May, my hon. Friend the Member for Dulwich and West Norwood (Helen Hayes) said in a debate that she had lost count of the number of times people had been refused visas to attend a wedding or funeral. She highlighted a rather disturbing case where a constituent of hers was waiting for a stem cell transplant, but his brother in Nigeria, who was the donor, had been refused a visa to come here.

Another case—it is not a family one, but it illustrates the problems in the system—was highlighted by The Guardian. A person who runs a charity he set up in Malawi wanted to come to meet donors and speak at the Hay festival. He was refused a visa. He applied again with support from people in the other place and the head of an international charity. He had a full programme of what he was doing, and he was still turned down. He cannot get in for a perfectly reasonable thing, even with the support of a national newspaper. I worry about the people who have not had that support.

The Hertfordshire Mercury reported the case of a father from Morocco who was unable to attend the birth of his child, despite showing evidence of flights booked into and out of the country. The most bizarre recent case I came across was that of a grandmother in Jamaica—she is a retired nurse—who had been consistently refused a visa to come here to see her children and grandchildren, despite the fact she had worked for 30 years for the NHS and was entitled to both a state pension and an NHS pension. I do not believe that anyone would think that the system was set up to stop Jamaican grannies with 30 years’ service in this country from visiting their grandchildren.

The problem is that since the Crime and Courts Act 2013, there are no appeals, except in very limited cases on grounds of racial discrimination or human rights. The Government justified that by saying that appeals were costly. They were, but a third of appeals were succeeding, which shows that the decision making was bad in the first place. Some 63% of the appeals that succeeded had introduced new information, leaving 37% where there was no new information and the
appeal still succeeded. To me, that says there is poor decision making. Worse than that, new information is often introduced on appeal because the grounds for refusal are so vague that people do not know what information they have to provide until they get to appeal.

The chief inspector has commented on cases where appeals are refused because the applicant did not provide particular information, had no way of knowing they needed to provide it and were not asked to provide it. He said that was unfair. He looked at recent cases. He pointed out that in 13% of cases where visas were turned down and 56% of cases where visas were allowed, there was not enough information on file for a proper audit of those decisions to be made. If that is the case, something is going very wrong. One of our petitions asks for appeals to be reinstated precisely because of that poor decision making.

I have talked to some of our petitioners. They have clearly said that in every other public authority, there is a way of appealing decisions if the authority does something wrong. That does not exist with these cases. If a local council makes a bad decision, someone can go to the ombudsman, but that is not possible in these cases. Others think they are being denied the opportunity to, as they see it, clear their name and prove that they have not given wrong information or tried to manipulate the system. If an appeal is not a possibility, people are caught on a merry-go-round of making applications and not always knowing why they have been turned down or what information they have to provide, and often being turned down again for a different reason.

Sometimes people are caught in a trap. I want to talk about a case that was given to me by a member of staff in the House. It is the case of a British citizen who teaches in South America, who has been married to a citizen of the country where he works for six years. Five years ago they came to visit his family — no problem at all. Recently they applied again and were turned down.

The only reason anyone can see is that since then they have had a baby and his wife had given up work, as many people do, to care for her child while the baby was small. They were refused, even though they provided evidence of his contract for work and the contract for their rental accommodation. The result of that was heartbroken grandparents in this country, who find it difficult to travel and who had arranged a baptism and a family holiday to get to know their grandchild, and a British family — British born and bred — who feel that the system does not work for them. It is the lack of faith in the system that has prompted the petitions.

I do not think — I have said this to the petitioners — we can grant people an automatic right to come here. There are always a few people who want to manipulate the system, but the evidence that we have indicates that that is not a particular problem with visitor visas. The Library’s information on exit checks for last year show that 96.7% of people who came here on visitor visas left at the right time. That is a slightly higher percentage than for those who come on work visas, so there does not appear to be a particular problem.

Another petition asked for a system like the Canadian super visas, whereby people are allowed to visit their families for up to two years. I think that slightly misunderstands what the Canadian system was brought in for. It was actually introduced to reduce settlement in Canada under the parents and grandparents settlement scheme, because people settling were deemed to be a bit of a strain on the Canadian medical system. I do not know whether that is true, but I do know that people have to provide £100,000 worth of health insurance, which is fine if someone is wealthy and healthy enough to be accepted, but not much help to people such as our granny in Jamaica or a young couple from South America. The petitions might not have the solutions to the problem, but they, including the one asking for the right of appeal to be reinstated, highlight issues that the Home Office needs to look at.

We conducted some public engagement with surveys of people who had signed petitions about visas. We got more than 2,000 responses and we heard the same stories again and again: mothers unable to come to a daughter’s wedding; nieces not able to come and be bridesmaids; and parents who could not come to help with a new baby — sometimes even a premature baby. Some of the stories we heard verged on the bizarre and seemed to indicate to me that the more honest people were, the more likely they were to be rejected. My general view is that villains know how to manipulate the system.

We had a grandmother, for example, who had said that she would be looking after her grandchild while the parents were at work — she was going to get to know the grandchild — and she was turned down on the grounds that that was paid work. Anyone who knows anything about grandparents knows that, far from having to pay them to look after their grandchildren, someone is more likely to be trampled in the rush to look after them. It is nonsense. We also had the case of someone in the British forces, whose mother was denied a visa to attend his passing out parade. Yet another military family, who had had their second child, were keen to get the husband’s niece over for a couple of months to help out. She had finished one set of exams, but was going back to school. She was refused a visa. The family were desperate for some help because the husband, who had served nine years in the forces, was about to deploy, leaving his wife on her own. Unless the British forces are running a concentrated visa scam, which is unlikely, I can see no reason at all for such decisions.

The people who responded to our survey understand that decisions are difficult to make. In fact, I was surprised at the number who said they would even be prepared to deposit a sum of money to be returned to them when their visitor left as evidence of good faith. They know it is difficult, but they find the whole process they are expected to go through excruciating. Some of them told us that their relatives had been so traumatised by the process, they did not want to apply again. Others used words such as, “demeaning”, “devastating”, “inhumane” and even “shameful”. Those are the words of British citizens living in this country and paying taxes here.

A family whose mother had been refused a visa twice, although she had been here before without any problem, said,

“What else can we actually do to prove that the visitor will return?”
That is a fair question. Another family, whose mother-in-law was refused a visa a couple of times—even though, again, she had been here before with no problem and left on time—said:

“I do understand that they have concerns about people coming and staying, but for genuine, hard-working taxpayers like us it seems very unfair that we are punished for immigration issues which we have no control over.”

That hits the spot. Immigration issues are being confused with issues about visitors, particularly family visitors. Because there is seldom an appeals process now, people feel they have no redress. That was highlighted for us by one of our respondents, a senior NHS doctor, who said that some time ago his mother applied to come over for the birth of his daughter. She was refused a visa, although it was granted on appeal, albeit when the child was two months old. Now his father would like to come and visit, but he has been turned down and was told that he does not have the financial resources to sustain him if he becomes ill, even though he has shown that he has health insurance. There is no appeal and the family, having shown they have got health insurance, are left wondering what else they have to show to get a visa for the father.

We heard from a businessman who employs 15 people in this country and is perfectly solvent. He could not get his mother-in-law a visa, even though she had been here before, again with no problem, and left on time. Such cases recur again and again. They cannot be seen any longer, as I admit I used to see them, as isolated incidents. They are flagging up systemic problems in the system.

Perhaps we should look at reinstating a category of family visas, as has been suggested by some of our petitioners. We should certainly look at the method of appeal, even if it is not like the old system. We need a proper method of review, but it depends on getting the decision making right in the first place and keeping the files up to date so that things can be properly reviewed.

People are not asking for anything unreasonable. All they ask for is a fair system that makes consistent decisions and tells people properly why they have been rejected; that allows them to know, when they apply again, what evidence they should produce to prove that they are genuine visitors; and that does not stigmatise people simply because of where they come from. That does not seem to be an unreasonable thing for British citizens to ask for—it seems very unfair that we are punished for immigration issues which we have no control over.

I will start where my hon. Friend left off, which is with thinking about how this feels. I have an Indian father, an English mother and a sister who lives in America. Every year, without fail, I—along with my mother and husband—apply for, and am granted, a visa to visit India, where I have a great many relatives, including a much-beloved, now quite elderly, aunt in her 90s, whom I completely adore. She is a role model to me, and has been since I was a small child.

I have cousins to whom I am very close, and their children are growing up and each year seem to be bigger and doing all sorts of interesting things. I cannot bear the thought of how it would feel to be kept apart from them, were I to be refused that visa. The visa system is moderately onerous, but it is clear. Each year, whenever I have difficulties with it, there is someone I can call who can give me advice on how to deal with any problems that I might have had, and it has got better each year.

The system for America is not without its flaws, and my mother is certainly very worried that in the course of my duties as an MP I might accidentally visit a country that will appear on one of President Trump’s lists. Although that is sort of funny, it is also heartbreaking, because my mother is truly terrified that I will risk not being let into the country to see my sister. Again, the thought of being prevented from seeing my sister is very painful to me. I try to think of how it must feel to be one of my constituents.

The problem is getting worse. My caseworkers have just messaged me to say that in my first year as an MP we had one such case. In my second year, 2016, we had five. We had a further five in 2017, but so far, after just six months of this year, we have had 10. I pay heartfelt tribute to my dedicated staff; particularly Michelle Boobier and Sheila Sharman, the constituency caseworkers. I sometimes feel that our caseworkers are not given the credit they deserve. Constituents tend to thank us when they get a visa granted, or some other problem solved. Almost always, the work was done by our dedicated, hard-working caseworkers, who are relentless, determined and completely committed to trying to do the right thing by our constituents.

My caseworkers are very smart women who are not likely to have the wool pulled over their eyes, or be hoodwinked by someone trying to pull a fast one. They take a lot of care over getting the details and information, and I trust them when they say to me, “This person has a good case.” It distresses me that my caseworkers are now feeling quite distressed about some of the people whom we have not been able to help.

To mention a couple of successes, last year we helped an Iranian mother to get a visa to see her son graduate in Bristol. That was a considerable effort. She had plenty of evidence to show that she wanted to return home afterwards, which she did. It meant the world to her that she was able to be in Bristol for her son’s graduation. Tragically, we had two doctors from Pakistan who wanted to see their mother one last time before she died. We were able to help them, but we know of other cases. Despite the Home Office’s stricture that we should bother it to expedite things only in matters of death or
the dying, unfortunately we often have cases where people are either dead or dying, but it does not seem possible to get things overturned.

I know that many of the Minister’s officials try very hard, and we have had some good experiences of officials who have been very sympathetic, but for whom it feels as though there is an underlying culture of distrust and a default setting. I do not hold the Minister responsible for that, but it seems to be there none the less. For instance, the parents of another constituent have been refused visas, even though they have visited many times before, have always returned home and can prove that they have very good reasons to return home.

We recently requested a review of a refusal of a visa for two teachers from a country that I am not going to name, because I do not want to jeopardise their application. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some good news on that at some point. They are teachers who have applied for visas to come to one of my local schools, as part of a school exchange programme. We have evidence galore that that is why they are coming; we have evidence up to the eyeballs. We hope that her officials will reconsider and that the teachers eventually succeed, because the school itself is desperately upset.

We find that in immigration inquiries the most common cases that we have are visa refusals, where people have been denied entry clearance to visit the UK. The process of applying is so complex and expensive, and there is no right of appeal. It therefore seems terribly unfair that even the most insignificant error, which we are often able to see and say, “That may be where it went wrong,” is a reason for the Home Office to say, “Aha! There’s a mistake you made. Let’s refuse,” rather than exercising reasonableness.

Of course the Home Office needs to be satisfied that the visitor has sufficient ties to their home country, but the Indian visa system does not ask me for very much. It asks me to name my profession, and in my previous job I once provided a letter from my employer, but I have not been asked to provide a letter from Parliament. I understand why the Home Office is asking for sufficient evidence that the person will return to their country of origin, but the amount of proof required is so high that it seems that people from certain countries, as my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North said, feel bound to fail.

The most heartbreaking cases have involved people refused visas to visit sick or dying relatives. We have also had a father who was denied the opportunity to be present at the birth of his child. Although we helped one mother to be at the graduation of her son, others have been unable to attend graduation ceremonies, and parents have been unable to spend time with children and grandchildren.

My hon. Friend said that there is a strong suggestion—this is what we feel from our case load, which I admit might seem small—that certain countries seem to produce an automatic refusal. I urge the Minister to consider looking into whether that is the case, because that is our experience. That is not helpful for democracy. It does not help our constituents to feel faith in the democratic process. They feel increasingly that even MPs cannot help to right wrongs. That does not seem right: no matter how hard my caseworkers work and if we feel that there is a mountain of evidence but we have not been able to change anything, it gives our constituents the idea that even democratically elected representatives are impotent and useless, and have no power in the system whatever, no matter how hard we try.

I have three requests of the Minister that come from my caseworkers, whom I, again, thank greatly. Will she consider introducing an automatic right of approval of visitor visas for families of British citizens? I believe that family members of UK citizens should not have to meet exactly the same criteria as other applicants for a visit visa. Not being a citizen does not make our parents, siblings, children and grandchildren any less a part of our family. I believe that the only requirement should be that a British relative sponsor them.

I understand that the Minister might wish to introduce other requirements, but the requirements at the moment seem terribly, heartbreakingly unfair for the relatives of British citizens. For instance, I know, because I have looked into this, that were I to try to bring over my cousins from India, whom I am able to get a visitor visa to visit, the requirements would be very high. I am afraid even to ask for a visa, because I am terribly afraid of disappointing them.

Will the Minister introduce a super visa category for the parents of British citizens? My hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North laid out very well some of the problems and shortcomings of the Canadian super visa system, but there must be some way to allow the parents of British citizens to come here—parents who definitely want to go home, and have a life to go home to. There should be some way to make it easier for British citizens to be able to see their parents. The Minister might say, “They can visit their parents in their country of origin,” and I have said that, too, but if they are working parents with children at school, it is not practical to do that as often as their parents wish to see them.

I ask the Minister to consider whether British citizens should be able to appeal the refusal of a family visit visa. My constituents consider the removal of the right to appeal to be one of the most egregious acts. They simply do not understand how that could be so in a democratic country. The appeals process for family visit visas was removed on 25 June 2013, allegedly to cut costs, but in my recent experience the UK Border Agency seems to have cut the process of justice and accountability at the same time as cutting costs. How can that be justified? Is the UK Border Agency now judge and jury—the administrator and the rule maker? It certainly feels that way to my constituents, my caseworkers and me.

I respectfully ask the Minister to consider this. We are a modern, democratic country, and I am sure she wishes us to be known, post-Brexit, as outward facing. We live in a very confusing world—a world that increasingly feels divided, rather than united—so is now not the time to show the world what a country that is capable of bringing people together and reuniting families can truly do if it tries hard enough? I ask her to consider the requests made by the petitioners, my caseworkers and me.

5.1 pm

Faisal Rashid (Warrington South) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friends the Members for Warrington North (Helen Jones) and for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) for
putting the case very eloquently and for giving us information and examples. We are debating this petition because, across the United Kingdom, the relatives of British citizens who want nothing more than to visit their family, are being prevented from doing so. My hon. Friends have given examples of constituents who have contacted them, and I have been contacted by many constituents who are victims of the Government’s cruel and inhuman approach to immigration. I am pleased that we have the opportunity to raise their plight today.

My constituent, Mr Sul, came to the United Kingdom in 2006 to study for his masters. He has worked in the United Kingdom ever since and was granted citizenship in 2015. He owns a home in the United Kingdom and his children were born here. How did the Government choose to thank him for making this country his home, for contributing to our economy and for his family’s contribution to their local community? They denied his wife the opportunity to have her mother present for the birth of their first child, and they denied his father the opportunity to travel to the UK to meet his grandchildren and take pride in the home his eldest son had built. That is absolutely inhuman. My constituent is not alone; many others have contacted me and my hon. Friends.

Unjustly refusing visas causes unnecessary emotional distress and keeps families apart, preventing them from sharing important moments together. The practice of preventing visitors from entering the country is not only deeply unfair to those UK citizens and their families, but harmful to the UK’s tourism industry. Those people are potential tourists who would spend their money on local goods and services, boosting the local economy.

We all recognise the need to secure our borders, reduce illegal immigration, tackle organised crime and protect national security, and I commend the work of the vast majority of Border Agency officials who work hard daily to do just that, but let us be clear: denying those visas is not about border security. It is an ideological choice by the Conservative Government to create a hostile environment for immigrants and their families, which was first launched by the Prime Minister. The Home Office is misusing immigration rules to prevent honest people from visiting the country, and is so afraid of any challenge to its unjustifiable decisions that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West said, in 2013 the Government removed the right of appeal for family visitor visas. They have allowed the Home Office to become judge, jury and executioner in relation to the lives of the families of British citizens. This gross misuse of immigration rules is similar to an issue we debated in Westminster Hall last month, at which the Minister was also present—the use of paragraph 322(5) of the immigration rules to deport honest, hard-working immigrants.

The rejection of family visit visas and the refusal to hear appeals in cases such as that of my constituent are yet another manifestation of the hostile environment policy. We have a new Secretary of State, but we appear to have the same old problems. Will the Minister tell us that things will be different under the new Secretary of State? Will he tackle the hostile environment policy, which has infected the Home Office since the days when the Prime Minister was Home Secretary, or should we expect more of the unfair mistreatment of British citizens and their families that we have witnessed since 2010? I second the positive suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West and urge the Minister to look at them seriously.

5.6 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to participate in this debate under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I draw the House’s attention to my declaration in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, in respect of the research support I receive in my office for the work I do on immigration and asylum matters.

My constituents’ experiences are similar to those that my hon. Friends have related this afternoon. There is, to a degree at least, a sense that there is a culture of disbelief in the Home Office when cases come forward for decision. I am sure the Minister will wish to address that. The consequence is often heartbreak for families: relatives miss important family occasions and celebrations. As we have heard, they miss the births of grandchildren and come too late to visit terminally ill relatives. Sometimes they worry that there is little hope that very elderly relatives will ever have the chance to see family members again. Even if a favourable decision is eventually made, they may have had many months and years of heartbreak, during which time the family members remained apart.

I am sure the Minister understands that, in many such cases, timely decision making is of the essence, because the events are often one-off, significant occasions that cannot be repeated. The first question that I want to put to the Minister is, how can the process be made speedier, as well as more reliable and compassionate?

Thangam Debbonaire: Are my hon. Friend and the Minister aware of the speed with which the Indian e-visa system now operates? One can fill in a form on Sunday and have an e-visa returned by Wednesday.

Kate Green: I did not know about the speed of the Indian e-visa system, but I am sure the Minister will want to comment on that comparison.

The decision making often seems irrational and random, in terms of the way factors determine the outcome of applications. As we have heard—I have experience of this from my constituency—people who have previously been granted visitor visas, made a visit to this country and then returned to their home country find that when they submit subsequent applications to do exactly the same thing, often with exactly the same facts, their new application is rejected. As we have heard, visas are often refused because they lack some key piece of information. It has often never been made clear to the applicant that it is necessary, so it is hardly surprising that it is not supplied. Again and again in my constituency, I have heard examples of very clear evidence of an intention to return that has seemingly simply been ignored.

We heard about the reports of the independent chief inspector of borders and immigration. The 2015 report found considerable evidence of the systemic problems mentioned by my hon. Friends and of the rules not being applied appropriately. In one overseas visitors section, in Jordan, the inspector found that evidence was overlooked or misinterpreted in more than 10% of applications, and that 43% of refusal notices were “not balanced”. In a wider report, again by the inspector, 30% of visit visa cases sampled failed the Department’s
[Kate Green]

own quality standards. I know that the Minister will not be satisfied with that kind of performance, and we need to hear what she will do about it.

In cases from my constituency, applicants have provided evidence of land ownership and substantial personal wealth, or income statements from their employers, only for such evidence of resources seemingly to be ignored. In other cases, children, grandchildren, the spouse or other family dependants have remained at home—clearly an applicant will want to return to them—but cases have simply been dismissed for not demonstrating strong enough family ties. It is hard to think what more an applicant can do than to demonstrate a tie to a spouse, child or grandchild.

I have heard of refused cases of applicants who have held responsible roles in their home country. In one case I have been dealing with recently, the visitor was a councillor—an elected member of the local legislature—and in another, a doctor and university professor was deemed likely, for some reason, not to return home. I have seen the Home Office dismiss what it characterises as “claims” to be in employment, implying that an applicant is lying in the application. Applicants feel very offended, hurt and alarmed about that. I have heard of cases in which families have been forced to make multiple applications, as they receive refusal after refusal, costing them thousands of pounds and going on for years and years. None of that is satisfactory or acceptable, and I do not think that the Minister will tolerate it either. I look forward to what she has to say.

The Minister is aware of my particular concern, because I have expressed it to her directly in the past: family members seeking to visit who are resident in refugee camps. I understand how difficult such a situation is for the Government to assess but, by definition, such people cannot demonstrate an immediate intention to return to their home country, because that country is not safe. Often they will not have documentation because they have fled, leaving everything. However, she knows—I have discussed a particular case with her—that those families are as desperate to visit as any. Family members have gained asylum in this country successfully, which is greatly to this country’s credit—for example, under the community sponsorship scheme—but, having given that initial welcome to such desperate people, we cannot agree to their family members making visits at a time of important family need. Will the Minister look at what can be done in this situation—I recognise that it is difficult and challenging—to ensure that when applicants are resident in refugee camps we have the most flexible and compassionate approach possible to give them the chance of family visits, too?

We heard from all my colleagues about the problems that have arisen following the removal of appeal rights. Not only is that unjust and worrying for applicants, because they feel that the refusal of an administrative application will taint a future one, but it is disingenuous of the Home Office to advise that a fresh action is quicker and more straightforward than making an appeal. I have heard cases of constituents who have had to go through the process again and again.

Equally importantly, however, the lack of an appeal process might remove any route or incentive for the Home Office to learn from and improve on poor and wrong decision making. The lack of such a process removes the feedback loop that might drive up quality standards. With my colleagues, I urge the Minister to look again at some reinstatement of appeal rights.

In conclusion, we are clearly not talking about isolated incidents; the system is poor, irrational and painful for families, and none of us can see any sign of things getting better—indeed, we fear that they are getting worse. As my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) said, in the context of global travel, of it being more common for families to live in different countries, and of Brexit—whatever happens about settled status, in future more European visitors will visit family members who may not qualify for settled status—and when, as we understand, the Home Office faces so many pressures, to streamline and simplify the visitor visa system would surely be an early win for the Government, and one that would make an enormous difference to families who simply long to see their loved ones at times of important family events.

5.15 pm

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) on the way in which she introduced the debate. I was tempted to accuse her of misleading the House, because she said that she was not an expert, but by the sound of her speech, she certainly is now. In fact, we have had four excellent contributions so far.

I also congratulate the petitioners sincerely on securing a parliamentary debate on this important issue. The numbers signing the petitions have been remarkable—the first petition, in particular—and that indicates clearly how strongly the rules impact on people and families and how strongly people feel the need for change.

An important preliminary point to make is that I suspect that one reason why so many have been attracted by the petitions is that, increasingly, many people find that a family visit is the only way they get to see their partners, husbands, wives, children and parents—close family members—as well as distant relatives. Why? The reason is that we have some of the most draconian family immigration rules in the world. Tens of thousands of families are split apart, all in the name of the net migration target.

Almost half our population would not be able to meet the maintenance requirements imposed by the coalition Government, and the rules have a disproportionate impact on young people, women and those living outside London and the south-east. One reassurance that the Minister could give us today is that she has—I hope—ditched the proposals in the Conservative party manifesto to make those rules even more draconian by increasing the thresholds for various family visas.

We should not pretend, however, that improvements to the family visit visa rules would be the big fix or the final outcome that we are looking for. Such improvements would be welcome, but fundamental reform of the family migration rules is needed. Whether we look at the report of the all-party group on migration or of the Children’s Commissioner on the so-called “Skype families”—they included 15,000 children in 2015, according to the commissioner, so how many thousands more are there now?—or various other critiques, the pain that the rules are causing cannot be ignored.
Compared internationally, the UK is an outlier with its severe family immigration policies. One 2014 comparison of 38 western countries on facilitation of family unity put the UK in last place. UK requirements are difficult to meet, not only in the substantive rules but in the impenetrability of the evidence rules that must be met.

Family visits have therefore become even more important. That is not to say, of course, that they were not already important, and they certainly remain important for people who want to visit more distant relatives. As the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid) pointed out, the sense of injustice and heartbreak that many feel in such circumstances would be compounded if the result was missing a special occasion such as a wedding, a special birthday, a baptism or a passing out ceremony.

A number of colleagues have highlighted some very sad individual cases—elected councillors, doctors, transplant donors, charity visitors, long-serving nurses, grandparents and wedding guests all being denied visit visas—and I join the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) in paying tribute to the caseworkers who did so much of the hard work in such cases. I could mention a handful of examples, but I think we have heard enough about the sorts of decisions that are too often being made.

Mistakes happen, and there will always be decisions with which we disagree. I recognise that entry clearance officers have a difficult job, but, as a number of hon. Members pointed out, there are deeper issues. Some of them were touched on in the 2015 inspection by the chief inspector of borders and immigration, which the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston highlighted. Those systemic issues, as she put it, included a lack of proper reasons being kept on file and, too often, the ignoring of positive evidence by decision makers, so that more than 40% of decisions were considered by the inspector to be imbalanced. Requirements were, in essence, made up by individual entry clearance posts. The inspector found quality concerns in 25% of entry clearance management reviews. The hon. Members for Bristol West, for Warrington North and for Stretford and Urmston were also right to highlight the danger of decisions being generally made based on the country of origin alone.

It must be heartbreaking, especially for those who face the double whammy of being excluded from having their loved ones—husbands, wives and partners—join them here permanently, and being excluded from even having their loved ones come to visit on a temporary basis. In response to the points raised in the three petitions, there is a very strong case for arguing that there should be at least a strong presumption in close family cases that in the absence of specific, individual information to the contrary, an applicant who has shown that he or she can afford the visit and has suitable accommodation should be taken to be just that—a visitor, who will leave again in accordance with their visa. There must be an end to the deep-seated culture of disbelief and the failure to take into account things such as positive immigration or visit histories. Too often, decisions have been made because something is not clear or a document is missing. Why not pick up the phone instead of simply reaching straight for the refusal paragraphs?

There is so much we can learn from Canadian immigration laws and policies, which tend to be based on evidence and respect instead of random targets.

The hon. Member for Bristol West rightly said that there seems to me to be real merit in providing family members with better access to the country than random tourists would generally get. I note the concerns that the hon. Member for Warrington North raised, and I will have to look at them.

The hon. Member for Warrington North made a persuasive case for a proper appeal right, and I absolutely agree. That would simply recognise the importance of these visits and the challenge that it poses to family relationships if there is no ability to pay short visits. It would also help, as the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston said, to concentrate the minds of the decision makers and improve the quality of decision making. Most importantly, it would simply be a way to access justice.

In conclusion, I welcome these petitions and I am happy to provide my broad support to them. However, the Government should be in no doubt that fundamental reform of their outrageous, outdated and inhumane family migration rules is urgently required.

5.22 pm

Azfar Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl. I also thank my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones) for opening this important debate and for so eloquently and forcefully putting the case forward. I thank all my colleagues for their contributions. It is also appropriate to thank all the tens of thousands of people who signed the three petitions. I am glad that we are debating this important topic.

The petitions we are considering raise two questions. First, do we want an immigration policy that respects the right to a family life, or one that breaks up families and prevents British citizens from being able to see their loved ones? Secondly, do we want a process that is effective, fair and transparent? I believe the answer to both questions should be yes. Our family visa system is not working. Too many visas are routinely rejected on false or unfounded grounds. Removing the right of appeal has meant that decision makers are not being held to account for poor performance. Where there is no accountability, prejudice and unequal treatment can flourish unchecked.

There are three main grounds on which family visa applications are unjustifiably rejected. As an MP with probably one of the largest immigration case loads, I can say this from personal experience and from evidence provided by campaigners and lawyers. First, the Home Office will claim an applicant does not have the means to support themselves while they are in the UK, when in fact they have proven that they can or that someone in the UK will take care of their expenses. My constituent’s mother wanted to visit her children in the UK after the passing of her husband. Clearly, it was an extremely emotional time when we would all want to be able to mourn our close family members. Her application was rejected because the Home Office claimed that she could not provide evidence that she was able to support herself while she was here, even though both her sons had agreed to support her for the duration of her stay.

Secondly, the Home Office will claim that it is not confident that the applicant will leave the country on their stay. It also considers it never ends even when they are here for a specific purpose.
or event, they have booked a hotel only for a certain period and possibly even a return flight, and they can prove they have permission from employers to leave work only for a limited period. Another constituent wanted her aunt to come and visit her. Her aunt has seven sons, two daughters and 10 grandchildren who she takes care of as a housewife in Pakistan. It is clear from her case file, and from my conversations with my constituent, that she fully intended to return after her visit, yet her family visa application was rejected because the Home Office did not believe she would go back at the end of her stay.

Thirdly, possibly the most infuriating and outrageous grounds for the Home Office to reject an application is because it has made a mistake. The case of Chineze Azubuike was reported in The Guardian. She had not seen her family for 14 years when she invited them to London for her wedding. All of her seven applications on behalf of her family were rejected on the grounds that they did not “have sufficient funds available”– a claim that her immigration lawyer called “unlawful, spurious and plainly wrong”.

As well as ignoring the fact that Chinwe and her husband had committed to pay all her family’s expenses, the decision was based on a basic error by Home Office decision makers, who confused yearly with monthly income. The accusation that the couple were lying about their income was therefore particularly insulting.

Basic errors resulting in outright rejections are not unique to the visitor visa system. I will discuss later wider failings in the Home Office, but from highly skilled migrants to the Windrush scandal, the Home Office cannot seem to get even the most basic information and checks consistently correct. The rate of refusals for visitor visas cannot be blamed solely on mismanagement and inefficiency. The assumption behind many of refusal letters is that, given the chance, nobody from Africa or the Indian subcontinent—such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka—could possibly want to return home at the end of their visit to the UK. That is deeply offensive, not to mention plainly wrong.

I represent the great city of Manchester where, every two years, we have an international festival. Festivals up and down the country have difficulties.

Kate Green: My hon. Friend will know because the Gurdwara is in his constituency, although many of the worshippers are my constituents, that there is particular difficulty in getting visitor visas for members of the Sikh community to come to participate in religious festivals.

Afzal Khan: I am aware of that difficulty. There are similar issues when events are going on at the mosques. Manchester International Festival invited Abida Parveen, a renowned artist of international calibre, but it was a struggle—we all had to get involved to make sure she could get here. Only about a month ago, I got involved with another incident concerning an international artist. Many people, including my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington South (Faisal Rashid), I am sure, enjoy listening to Abrar-ul-Haq. He struggled to get a visa for a charity event and the whole event had to be cancelled. There are issues here that the Minister should consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) touched on the introduction of e-visas in India, which is proving effective. I hope the Minister will elaborate on that and tell us whether e-visas will be rolled out to Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries.

Let me turn to my first question: do we want an immigration policy that respects the right to a family life? Article 8 of the European convention on human rights states:

“Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence.”

The Labour party believes that right should be protected. We are committed to allowing spouses to come to the UK without a minimum income requirement, we will not force children to pay more than £1,000 to obtain citizenship just because their parents were not born here, and we will allow all reasonable requests for visitor visas.

An estimated 15,000 children live without a parent because of restrictions on family visas. When a reasonable request for even a visitor visa is turned down, families can be devastated. Children grow up used to the possibility that they may never see their parents, even for a short visit. The Government’s spouse visa rules have already been found to breach article 8. The Government have tweaked the wording of their policy since that ruling, but the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants argues that that has not made a difference to decision making. The right to a family life will be a guiding principle for Labour as we review our immigration system in government.

Does the Minister believe that charging £1,000 for citizenship is in the best interests of a child and their family? Does she think denying people the right to come for family visits—for weddings and funerals—respects the right to a family life? Family visitors are tourists, who contribute to our economy by visiting our great sights. Does she believe it helps her colleagues in the Department for International Trade sell the idea of a “global Britain” post-Brexit for it to be almost impossible to sustain family ties across borders? How does the fact that anyone who comes to Britain runs a high risk of not being able to have their family visit them while they are here help to build trade links?

My second question is: do we want an immigration process that is effective, fair and transparent? The right to appeal in family visa cases was removed in 2013—a move the Labour party opposed. Before their abolition, one in three appeals was successful, which raises concerns about how decisions were—and still are—made. The Minister must address the underlying issues with the application process and reinstate appeals so that her Department can properly be held to account.

In a recent report, the Select Committee on Home Affairs made a powerful and convincing case that the “refusal culture” in the Home Office is in dire need of root-and-branch reform. It pointed out that the removal of legal aid and of the right of appeal removed a “valuable legal check on decision-making within the Home Office despite no obvious signs that the quality of decisions had improved”.

That lack of vital checks and balances was a strong factor in the Windrush crisis.

A system that sets people up to fail, coupled with the removal of checks and balances, has caused the wrong people—some of them British citizens—to be caught
up in the hostile environment. On top of that, there is no evidence that any of those policies achieve their apparent aims. The chief inspector of borders and immigration said that the right-to-rent scheme “had yet to demonstrate its worth as a tool to encourage immigration compliance, with the Home Office failing to coordinate, maximise or even measure effectively its use, while at the same time doing little to address the concerns of stakeholders.”

The Government’s approach to visitor visas is part of a refusal culture and a punitive hostile environment, which work against people who want to come to the UK, against British citizens who want to maintain family ties and against our country’s best interests. The chief inspector of borders and immigration and the Home Affairs Committee—indeed independent bodies that spend significant time and resources investigating the Home Office—are united in saying that the effectiveness of the hostile environment has not been proved, and the Government have consistently ignored legitimate concerns that it hits the wrong people.

We clearly need to re-examine the visitor visa system and immediately reinstate appeals. It took too long for Ministers to realise the extent and devastation of the Windrush crisis. We need proper checks and balances to avoid a repeat of that scandal.

5.35 pm

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Dame Cheryl, and I congratulate the Chair of the Petitions Committee, the hon. Member for Warrington North (Helen Jones), on introducing this important debate.

I thank Members for their contributions and echo the comments of the hon. Member for Bristol West (Thangam Debbonaire) on the work of not only Members’ caseworkers, but UK Visas and Immigration decision makers. I think everyone in the Chamber would agree that their job is not easy.

I am not going to pretend that we at the Home Office always get things right. Although I am not in a position to comment on the individual cases that hon. Members raised, it is of course perfectly true that, both as a constituency Member and as Immigration Minister, I see cases where mistakes have been made. I am painfully conscious of the human impact of those mistakes—the missed graduation ceremonies, births and marriages at which families had wished to come together and celebrate, and the occasions when families had wished to come together to mourn. I know how difficult those situations are.

I do not wish to come across from the outset as unsympathetic, but I am going to point out the scale of visitor visa applications and of the visa and immigration service more generally, and the rate and average speed at which visas are granted. In the year to December 2017, UKVI received just over 3 million visa applications globally, of which 2.7 million were granted. Some 2.1 million visitor visas were granted last year—an increase of 10% on the previous year. The average processing time for a non-settlement visa globally was less than eight days. Some 97% of non-settlement visa applications were decided within the standard processing time of 15 working days.

It is important to reflect that UKVI works hard and at scale to process the number of visas it processes. It is completely incorrect and misleading to suggest that visa decisions are based on nationality bias. All applications are and must be considered on their individual merits and in line with the immigration rules, regardless of the nationality of the applicant.

The Government of course welcome genuine visitors to the UK. We want people to come here on holiday and to visit family, to study and to do business here. It is a key Home Office goal that, as well as keeping the country safe, we should contribute to the prosperity of the United Kingdom. In 2016, more than 38 million people visited the UK. Those visitors in combination spent more than £22.5 billion. Visit Britain forecasts that in 2018 we will welcome close to 42 million visitors, who are projected to spend almost £27 billion. More specifically, the Government recognise the importance of family ties. Families should be able to spend quality time together, take part in important family events and build strong connections.

Thangam Debbonaire: The Minister is generous in giving way. Will she clarify something? I think she said that in 2017, 2.1 million visitor visas were granted, each in less than eight days. Is that figure for family visitor visas or for visitor visas, full stop? If the latter, does she know how many were family visitor visas? There are aspects specific to those visas.

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady is correct to pick that up. I was specific in what I said, which was that, in total, 2.1 million visitor visas were granted. I do not have the number for family visitor visas in front of me, but I am happy to write to her after the debate with that.

The petitions we are discussing focus on visitor visas, and I will begin by setting out why we must have them. The first duty of the Government is to keep citizens safe and the country secure, and visas are one of the effective means we have in that regard. They are a good tool for reducing illegal immigration, tackling organised crime and protecting our national security.

Nationals of some non-European economic area countries need a visa to visit the UK. However, the requirements that must be met are the same for everyone whether there is a visa requirement or not. All applications, whether lodged at a visa application centre or at the UK border, are assessed case by case according to individual merits and against the part of the immigration rules that relates to why someone is coming to the UK. Visitor visas are available with validities of six months, two years, five years and 10 years, which allows those wishing to visit the UK regularly or at short notice to do so without having to apply for a new visa each time they wish to travel.

Thangam Debbonaire: The Minister is being terribly generous in giving way, but I must press her. The debate is specifically about family visitor visas, which are for a specific group of people whom the Home Office often seems to suspect will stay on because they are family visitors. That is not the same as general visitor visas.

Caroline Nokes: If the hon. Lady will be a little generous with her patience, I will come to the point of the three petitions we are considering. I did think it important to give a little context to begin with.
I am absolutely committed to ensuring that the UK visa service is high performing, customer focused and continually improving—that last point is important—in terms of both products available and the route to apply for them. There is always room to improve and—as we respond to evolving demands and requirements, harness new technology and reflect customer experiences and needs—we have a good story to tell.

As I said, 99% of non-settlement applications were processed within 15 days and the average processing time last year was just under eight days. Overall, customer satisfaction remains high. Comparisons are not straightforward, but we continue to believe that our visa service stands up well against key competitor countries. Having said that, I accept that we occasionally make mistakes, and I will address that later.

We continue to innovate, and our mission to deliver world-class customer service is informed by customer insight. For example, Access UK, a new intuitive online application service, has been successfully rolled out. Within the next few months, almost all customers worldwide will be able to apply for their new visa, visa extension or change of visa type via the new digital platform. UKVI also offers premium services, which mean that a visit visa can typically be processed in five days, and in some locations there is a super-premium service.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Afzal Khan) referred to e-visas. I have much enthusiasm for the introduction of electronic travel authorisations, which I very much hope to see when the immigration Bill is introduced. Perhaps I might be able to look forward to his support on that.

The immigration rules set out the requirements to visit the UK, usually for up to six months. They apply to all visitors, and all applications are considered on their merits, regardless of the nationality of the applicant. Visitors must satisfy the decision maker that they are genuine visitors to the UK, that what they are coming to do here is allowed and that they will not work or access public funds. The decision maker looks at all aspects of an individual’s application and makes a credibility assessment against the immigration rules on the balance of probabilities.

I turn to the petitions, which call for a new visa category for parents of British citizens similar to that in Canada, automatic approval of visitor visas for families of British citizens and British citizens to be able to appeal the refusal of a family visitor visa. I shall address each in turn.

The Canadian super visa permits the parents or grandparents of a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada to visit for up to two years, rather than for six months at a time as is usual. There are additional eligibility requirements, including minimum income thresholds, financial sponsorship guarantees from the family in Canada, Canadian medical insurance policies and medical examinations. Facts about applicants’ ties to their home country, as well as the overall economic and political stability of that country, are considered.

The UK’s long-held position is that visitors are those individuals who, in the vast majority of cases, come to the UK for a maximum of six months. We do not consider being in the UK for two years at a time as temporary or visiting, and therefore we do not intend to adopt a model like that of Canada. To do so, thereby allowing a select group of people to remain in the UK for two years as visitors, would mean that important considerations against the immigration rules would not be applied consistently, which could raise equality concerns.

Visitor visas are available with long validities, which means that people do not have to apply for a new visa each time they want to visit. Additional services are also available that reduce the processing time if, for example, people need to travel urgently. Long-term routes for family members are available; I will address them later.

The next petition calls for automatic approval of visas for family members of British citizens. Automatically approving visas rather undermines the benefits that the visa system gives us in border security. Visas are an effective tool for the UK in reducing illegal immigration, tackling organised crime and protecting national security. Automatically approving visas for a select group of people without consistent consideration could also lead to discrimination against people who do not have family members settled in the UK, but have just as valid a reason for wishing to visit. There would also be a danger of additional complexity in the assessment process around how someone confirmed that they were the family member of a British citizen. Unintended consequences could make the application process longer, more difficult and costly for everyone, due to the resources needed to undertake any additional verification that may be required.

The vast majority of visitor visa applications made are granted. Last year, the figure stood at 90%. That equates to more than 2 million visitor visas issued last year, which is an increase of 10% on the previous year. Those statistics mean little to those who do not get the visa they have applied for, especially if they feel that a mistake has been made in processing the application.

Afzal Khan: Does the Minister believe that a relative abroad of anyone who lives here would fall into the same category as anyone else, or would they have a special position because family life required that relationship to be maintained?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman asks an interesting question, but it is important that visa applications are considered consistently wherever the individual comes from in the world and whether they have family here or not. When we are seeking to attract visitors to the UK, we do not wish to discriminate against people who do not have family members here, which he pointed out was important.

That brings me to the third petition, on appeals. As we heard earlier, family visitor appeals were removed by the Crime and Courts Act 2013. At that point, no other type of entry clearance application, including those involving work or study in the UK, carried a full right of appeal in the event of refusal. The wide-ranging appeals reform introduced by the Immigration Act 2014 means that rights of appeal are now available only in cases involving asylum or humanitarian protection, human rights or rights under EU law. Where someone makes an application for a visitor visa and that application is refused, they will be provided with reasons for that refusal. It is open to those who have been refused to make a fresh application in which they can address any reasons given for the previous refusal.
There are practical reasons why a new application is a better approach than an appeal, both generally and for the individual visitor. Before the removal of the appeal right, such appeals accounted for about a third of all immigration appeals and, because of the volume of such cases in the system, they could take up to eight months to be concluded. Asylum appeals and other appeals on fundamental rights issues were therefore also delayed.

By the time the appeal had been determined, the circumstances might well have changed. For example, a document relevant to the application may have been found. There was also the possibility that the family event for which the visa was needed had already taken place, in which case the visitor, the person being visited and the appeal system—everyone—lost out. By contrast, the service standard for straightforward non-settlement visa applications is 99% processed within 15 days.

Stuart C. McDonald: I do not think it is fair to say we are asking for an appeal right instead of the ability to put in a second application; it is about having the choice. If there is urgency about it, someone can make a second application. However, if they receive two or three refusals, surely the only way they will ever be able to challenge that is through an appeal.

Caroline Nokes: Speed is important, but also when someone receives a refusal the reasons are given and can be addressed in a fresh application.

The removal of the right of appeal for family visitor visas was regarded as a proportionate measure to ensure that a right of appeal was available in the most significant and complex cases and that another avenue—that of making a new application taking into account the reasons for refusal—was available in visitor visa cases. However, I accept that sometimes mistakes are made and I take the distress caused very seriously. I reassure hon. Members that if a customer is unhappy with any aspect of the service they receive, there are routes to provide feedback, request a refund or lodge a complaint. Those are all made clear in the communications that go out to customers at every point of their application. Locally, teams rigorously interrogate complaints data and respond to arising issues.

I reassure Members that the Government are absolutely committed to welcoming genuine visitors to the UK. I take seriously my duty to balance border security and the priority of having a high-performing, customer-focused and continually improving visa service.

Helen Jones: I thank all those who have spoken today, for despite what the hon. Member for Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East (Stuart C. McDonald) kindly said, I am not an expert on the subject of the debate. In fact, the only family in my constituency that I can think of, currently, who have someone abroad are called Lingard—but I think we will let Jesse back in.

It is important that Members have spoken about individual cases. We have heard a record of poor and inconsistent decision making and failure to read documents properly. I am sorry that the Minister is not taking that on board as she should. It is not possible always to get things right in any visa system, but there are systemic problems that affect British residents, taxpayers and citizens.

We have raised the individual cases not in the expectation that the Minister will comment on them—of course she cannot—but to illustrate the problems. In her response, she confused visitors to this country with those who need visas. They are not the same thing, as we all know. She needs to take the problems with visas for families more seriously. The mistakes are not occasional. They happen frequently, as we have heard, and cause distress to people in this country who are denied contact with their families. The vast majority of people the Committee has heard from are respectable, decent British citizens who simply want to have contact with their families. That is not a big ask.

I am sorry that the Minister does not seem to see the problems, and that she does not see that there is a problem in having no appeal system. That reduces the incentive to get things right first time. It means people do not learn from mistakes because, as has been said, there is no feedback loop. I am sure that we shall return to this problem, because it affects many citizens of this country and causes them anxiety. I hope that, in time, the Home Office will recognise that and separate the issue of immigration from that of visitor visas. That is not happening now but it needs to happen fairly urgently.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered e-petitions 206568, 210497 and 201416 relating to family visitor visas.

5.53 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Tuesday 10 July 2018

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY in the Chair]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Air Passenger Duty

9.30 am

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): I beg to move,
That this House has considered air passenger duty throughout the UK.

Good morning, Sir David. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

Air passenger duty is a protracted issue that Parliament has had many opportunities to consider since its introduction more than 20 years ago. The fundamental premise of my party’s position on air passenger duty and the thrust of the debates throughout recent decades is the economic barrier and detriment that air passenger duty— it as an arbitrary charge on short-haul and long-haul flights—causes for our economy more generally, for our tourism industry and for connectivity within and outwith the United Kingdom. This is a timely opportunity for the House to consider the impacts of air passenger duty once again.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It would not be a debate if I did not intervene. Air passenger duty was introduced as an environmental tax to try to discourage people from using planes. Does the hon. Gentleman think that it has worked at all in that function?

Gavin Robinson: I am delighted to have an intervention so early and to have it from the hon. Gentleman. The answer is no—it has not worked to protect our environment at all. The Treasury call for evidence published as a result of the confidence and supply agreement states clearly: “APD is a tax based on the number of chargeable passengers aboard an aircraft taking off from a UK airport, and is the only tax applied on air travel as the government does not apply VAT to airline tickets or levy a tax on fuel.”

Somebody who is interested in the environmental impacts of air travel would suspect that a tax might be attributed to fuel, given that the fuel causes the damage. When the Labour Government considered APD back in 2006, they felt they needed to strengthen the opportunity to protect the environment through air passenger duty. Department for Transport modelling indicated that, even after the tax was introduced, the residents of North Tyneside have paid more than £38 million in APD. Is that fair or commensurate with the economic problems that we face in the north-east when we need to increase our trade and let people go on hard-earned holidays?

Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. As he has said, the issue affects other parts of the United Kingdom. A Fair Tax on Flying estimates that, since the measure was introduced, the residents of North Tyneside have paid more than £38 million in APD. Is that fair or commensurate with the economic problems that we face in the north-east when we need to increase our trade and let people go on hard-earned holidays?

Gavin Robinson: The hon. Lady is entirely right. She indicates how APD acts as an economic barrier and a detriment. It curtails growth and success and stands in the way of business from the north of England to the south of England to other parts of the United Kingdom. It stands in the way of leisure pursuits and increases the costs on hard-working taxpayers and their money, whether it is for business or pleasure. She is entirely right. It is a barrier.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): My hon. Friend knows that the UK has the highest flight taxes anywhere in the world. We surely need to look at that. Hopefully we are going to be in a post-Brexit situation, so we need to make sure we can attract businesses and more people into the country. Cutting the tax is one way we can do it.

Gavin Robinson: The Minister does not need to be encouraged on the merits of leaving the European Union or indeed on the benefits, flexibility and freedoms that it will give us as a country to chart our own course and to set preferential tax rates that are beneficial and encourage growth, which I think must be a key factor for the Treasury.

I have mentioned the confidence and supply agreement and the call for evidence that was published. I understand that there has been extensive engagement, particularly from Northern Ireland industry, the airlines and all of those affected by this arbitrary tax. The consultation closed on 5 June and we look forward not only to the thoughtful engagement of the Treasury, but to its purposeful response. The issues that it took evidence on are the same issues that have applied to this debate for years. When the Treasury says that it wants to explore the economic impact of APD, it is exploring the same reports that were presented to it in 2011, 2013 and 2015—exactly the same reports carried out using exactly
the same modelling—which indicate that scrapping air passenger duty would be a net gain to the UK Treasury. I do not say that superficially, but whenever we stand before a Treasury Minister or try to argue with the Treasury and say, “We want to have this cut for a boost,” they look at you and say, “This will cost us money. If we take from this pot, how will we supplement it in another way?” The call for evidence will show, as every economic forecast has shown, that there is a net economic benefit to the reduction of air passenger duty.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that the major competitor to all of Northern Ireland’s airports—International, City and Londonderry—is Dublin? Dublin Airport has now attracted tens of millions of passengers. It is one of the fastest growing airports in western Europe and the Irish Republic does not have APD. We need a very competitive industry. Cancelling APD would give our airports a magnificent advantage over Dublin.

Gavin Robinson: My hon. Friend is right. I will come on to those Northern Ireland-specific issues, but first I will touch on the 2013 PricewaterhouseCoopers report. PwC uses—this will mean something to the Minister, and probably a lot to the officials sitting behind him, although it does not mean much to a layman like me—a computable general equilibrium model: exactly the same model that the Treasury uses when considering economic impacts. PwC updated its report in 2015, but the 2013 report was clear: scrap air passenger duty, and the Treasury will gain—not lose and claw back, but gain.

As a country we have gone from getting £343 million per year from air passenger duty in 1999, to £3.9 billion last year, with £4 billion estimated by 2021. When PwC updated its model in 2015, it said that there would be a direct boost to this country’s GDP of 0.5% in the first year, not a loss. How many times do we see newspaper headlines with every political decision that is having a detrimental impact on our GDP? Yet here is a simple and clear way that the Treasury could make a positive and progressive move that would lead to an increase in GDP in the very first year.

PwC said in 2015 that if we had done it that year, by 2020 we would have had 1.7% economic growth. That would have meant 61,000 additional jobs in this country, stimulation of our tourism and hospitality sectors, growth in business, 61,000 more families benefiting from a good income, 61,000 more families not otherwise relying on the state, and more revenue raised in tax than would be lost in abolition. If we can push one message, whether through the consultation, the call for evidence or the plethora of modelling and economic data that has been provided to the Treasury, it must be this: more tax revenue will be raised with the abolition of APD than its retention—an extra £570 million per year; had the decision been taken in 2015. That is not the £4 billion we are hoping to get, but £2 billion on top of that by 2020. That is a 50% increase, and were I a Treasury Minister I would jump at the chance.

Northern Ireland is, of course, close to our hearts. We have to look at the competitive disadvantage in Northern Ireland compared with our near neighbours in the Republic. Travelling from Belfast to Dublin airport is no different from travelling from Manchester to Birmingham. It is only 100 miles, so when someone is considering where to fly from and how much it will cost, the economic attractiveness of flying from Dublin is incredibly strong.

I do not put those figures forward to suggest that the UK tourism industry is in a bad place; it is not—we rank fifth out of 136 nations in travel competitiveness overall. However, on ticket price competitiveness, the Treasury report says we are 135th out of 136 countries. When someone is faced with the attractive economic proposition of travelling 100 miles down the road to Dublin, that is a barrier to growth in Northern Ireland, to additional connectivity, and to greater opportunity for leisure travel. It is frustrating and constraining the economic stimulus that we in Northern Ireland desperately need, and that our businesses crave.

In Northern Ireland we have had an 11% increase in travel, with 17% more air passengers going through our airports over the last five years. That sounds good, as the UK average is 22%, but what are Dublin’s figures? In 2014, the Republic of Ireland scrapped air passenger duty. From 2014 to 2018, the number of air passengers going through Dublin’s airports rose by 47%. That is an additional 9 million travellers, 1.2 million of whom come from Northern Ireland. That starkly illustrates what we are attempting to highlight. On average, 25% of the cost of a one-way short-haul ticket in this country is air passenger duty. It is not small beer; it is a considerable consideration for anyone seeking to travel.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which I served on during the time of the inquiry, has considered both the reduction and the abolition of air passenger duty, as well as a reduction in VAT. The debate does not focus on VAT but on air passenger duty. However, in our view the two are intertwined, and the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee agreed. The Republic of Ireland cut its VAT rate for tourism and hospitality, bringing it down to 9%. That means, again, that that industry has a competitive advantage. If somebody goes to visit the island of Ireland they will see our hospitality figures, hotel rates and so on with a significant uplift.

When the Republic of Ireland cut its hospitality and tourism VAT, there was a significant benefit to the economy again. For every percentage point dropped—and the rate went down to 9%—there was an increase of 1.7% in employment. That directly led to 4,800 new jobs in the Irish Republic, because it had the courage to cut the VAT associated with hospitality and tourism. The Northern Ireland Hotels Federation and Hospitality Ulster are clear that the economic benefit and growth created in the Northern Ireland economy through that simple reduction could result in 1,100 jobs.

I understand that we have two tax rates for VAT in this country—20% and 5%. We are constrained to those two at the moment, and even if we were not, we might not choose to have three, four or five because of the increase in burden. However, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee was quite clear that the greatest difference when Tourism Ireland, which is charged with promoting tourism on the island of Ireland under the Good Friday agreement, is promoting Northern Ireland, as opposed to the Republic of Ireland.

I hope that the Minister will not only outline a timetable for considering the Treasury’s call for evidence, but show an earnest desire to take, once thoughtful
consideration has been given to the mounting evidence that has been compiled over years, reasonable, beneficial, appropriate steps to stimulate the aviation sector across the United Kingdom, tourism and economic growth in Northern Ireland. I hope that we look at not only the specific calls of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on the abolition of APD and the reduction of tourism VAT, but other models as well.

One such model could be a route development fund. We could charge no APD for a three-year window. That would be a good way to test whether or not it is an economic barrier or detriment. There would be no loss to the Treasury on any new route, because it would just not charge for such a route. A route development fund would encourage growth and stimulate the sector to get business destinations, which we crave in Northern Ireland, such as Frankfurt in Germany, France or even transatlantic flights to the United States. We could give a route development fund three years to see whether it makes sense, and whether air passenger duty has been a significant barrier. Allow a route to develop without the threat of air passenger duty, allow it to stabilise and grow, and we believe that fruit would be borne through that sensible policy.

Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for securing this important debate. It is a timely opportunity to remind everyone of the important work that is under way in relation to the consultation on APD and VAT in Northern Ireland, which he referred to. He talked about the general issues, but there are two crucial issues that will result in a change for Northern Ireland: first, we are in competition with Dublin airport; and, secondly, Northern Ireland is cut off from the rest of the United Kingdom by the Irish sea, and therefore we are much more dependent on air links. When the Treasury looks at APD, it must conclude that, to make Northern Ireland competitive and to sustain our economy, it must take action to deal with those two issues.

Gavin Robinson: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about the competition and the constraints put upon us as a region. I could not have put it better. We are set aside by the Irish sea, and we rely on air connectivity. We do not have the choice to search around for off-peak train travel, or to easily jump on a boat, only to find that the bus is not at Stranraer waiting for us. When we look at stimulating our economic growth, we have to recognise that we are at a distinct disadvantage because of the Irish border and the tax duty regime in the Republic of Ireland.

I know that other hon. Members will mention the other devolved regions, which have committed to remove air passenger duty. Whenever a devolved Administration gets into such a discussion with the Treasury, it will ask for the cost to be covered by the block grant. It has had such conversations with Northern Ireland and with the Scottish Government. If there is further devolution, it may have such conversations with the north of England.

The whole thrust of that approach is predicated on loss and the Treasury not having something it otherwise would have had. If it is successful, Scotland, Northern Ireland or the north-east of England are not allowed to reap the rewards; they go back to the Treasury. We need confidence and optimism in this process. Evidence from across the United Kingdom shows that there are benefits. The Government must recognise our unique challenges and those of other parts of the United Kingdom.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I have a Valentine’s poem for him. It was written by Pubs of Ulster—the predecessor to Hospitality Ulster—to one George Osborne in February 2015. I hope it adds a bit of levity to a debate that can be turgid when we get down into the figures. I think pragmatists can see what the answer is.

“Labour is red
Tories are blue
Here’s something important
That you need to do
Our VAT rate is crippling
Our ability to grow
It’s putting off tourists
To other countries they go
Please cut the VAT rate
And help us create
A competitive market
For our beds and our plates
As you know my dear Chancellor
You’re close to our hearts
But elections are looming
And you may depart
So as your last action
Before the big day
Please cut the VAT rate
And you may get to stay!”

That is a little bit of fun, but it lays out the Northern Ireland tourism and hospitality industry’s calls about VAT.

Air passenger duty is clearly a barrier to growth. I trust that the Minister will thoughtfully consider all the calls for evidence. We look forward to hearing a suitable response today and in the weeks to come. I hope that, come the autumn statement, we will be in a position to make some sensible and serious proposals.

9.54 am

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), who made a detailed, informative presentation about air passenger duty. I commend him for his choice of tie colour. There is no better colour to wear as we approach 12 July than the one he is showing, not only to Westminster Hall but to the world. Well done to him. I hope he will be wearing the same tie—perhaps not exactly the same tie—in the run-up to the 12th.

I thank my hon. Friend for obtaining this debate and for his detailed presentation. The Democratic Unionist party has been trying to make progress on this issue for many years. He has outlined the facts. He is correct that the stats are sometimes a bit turgid, but they underline the importance of this issue. UK air passenger duty is currently the highest tax of its kind in the EU. That causes us some concern—not because it is about the EU, but because it gives us a comparison across the whole of Europe. The next-highest air passenger duty in the EU is Germany’s, which is half the UK’s. That indicates how far we have to go even to make a small
difference. The Minister must respond to that. APD is the highest European aviation tax for short-haul and long-haul flights. For long-haul flights, APD is the highest rate of tax in the world. Again, that illustrates how important this issue is.

Most countries do not have a tax on air travel, and many countries that did have an equivalent tax abolished it due to the negative impact it had on competitiveness, connectivity and the wider economy. They recognised that change was needed. If we need an incentive, we should look at what other countries have done and do likewise.

APD harms UK connectivity, and we are losing out to our European neighbours, particularly in respect of the emerging markets with which the UK should be strengthening its trading relationships after Brexit. We have seen the new flight connections with China advertised in the tube stations; Chinese airlines are trying to build up such connections. That is another part of the world with which we can have connectivity through air flight connections, and we should be looking at that.

My hon. Friend and I were talking before the debate about the figures for our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland. This year, Dublin airport had its highest ever number of passengers—29.6 million. Can we catch up with that? I am not sure we can, but we should at least try to respond in a way that enables us to get some of that passenger potential and retain it for ourselves.

Mr Gregory Campbell: My hon. Friend is outlining the numbers for Dublin airport—it will probably breach the 30 million mark this year—but is he aware that Dublin is constructing an additional runway to take advantage of the nil rate of APD? It is not only getting 30 million passengers; the number will go way up beyond that. Northern Ireland’s hospitality and tourism industry needs a competitive advantage to compete with that.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend always brings intelligent thought to his interventions. I confess that Dublin gives me easy access to the States every year. It is the airport that my family and I use whenever we go on holiday. One of the reasons why we do that is the customs connection. We do our customs clearance in Dublin, and when we get to the far side, we get off the plane, get our baggage, and we are away. With great respect, if we go from Heathrow to New York, we spend an hour in the long customs clearance line.

Nigel Dodds: My hon. Friend points to an important factor, but it has been proved that the single biggest factor that causes people to travel through Dublin airport is price. One fifth of all visitors to Northern Ireland use Dublin airport. The trouble is that many people who arrive at Dublin airport from the States and elsewhere do not, unfortunately, leave the greater Dublin vicinity or southern Ireland. They do not come north; that is the reality. Price is the crucial point. My hon. Friend refers to another important aspect, but air passenger duty means that he and many of my constituents are being directed—almost shown the road—to Dublin airport.

Jim Shannon: My right hon. Friend clearly states the real issue, which is price. He is absolutely right. I was just saying that one of the other advantages is customs clearance, which probably suits many, but the thing that puts people there first is price. Customs clearance is an incentive but an extra which makes things a wee bit easier. My right hon. Friend is also right about Tourism Ireland needing to ask how better to connect passengers who come into Dublin airport so that they do not stay in Dublin but go north. To be fair, Tourism Ireland does things well when I go every year to the Milwaukee Irish Fest in Wisconsin, but we can and should be doing a lot more. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right about that. First and foremost, people are attracted by price. That can be applied to many facets of life, such as shopping trends or changing shopping practices.

According to a report published by Airports Council International, this year the UK was the only European nation to see a decline in its direct connectivity. That is worrying. If that is happening and a trend shows that, we need to do something positive and constructive about it right away. The reason for our focus on APD is that we believe in Northern Ireland’s ability to compete with the rest of the UK, and any area, to attract and secure global business. Belfast has clearly become the cyber-security capital of the UK and has the potential to do even more than it has so far. Why is that? Look at the reasons to learn how important it is for us to have the APD issue addressed, which would be of advantage to other parts of the UK as well.

In Belfast and other cities in Northern Ireland, global tech names such as Citi or Allstate work in the sector with silicon valley firms such as BDNA, and they are all recognisable. Not only does our highly skilled workforce attract global investment, but our indigenous tech firms such as Kainos, Novosco and First Derivatives grow in size and are becoming global leaders, all in a region of Northern Ireland. We must pay tribute to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and to the Ministers—when the Assembly was working—for their hard work, which is still delivering today, even though the Assembly is not functioning as it once was—the seeds were sown and the dividends are being paid.

Much of our attraction is the skills base, supported by international-standard research facilities, with education and big business working together. We have the education, the big business, the opportunities, the quality of graduates and all those things together—Northern Ireland again leading the way for the UK to follow. That is how things happen and benefits are achieved.

Northern Ireland is consistently the top-performing region of the UK in national exams at age 16 to 18. The fact is that we have the graduates, and that encourages the investment, which is perhaps why we have done so well. Digital firms want to invest because the skills base is there in Northern Ireland, and still available, because we continue to produce graduates to build above and beyond where we are. We have the highest percentage of qualified IT professionals in the UK and Ireland, with more than 77% holding a degree-level qualification.

I say with respect to the Minister and all other regions, Northern Ireland is leading the way. From a small base of 1.8 million people—although the latest stats tell us we are nearly at 1.9 million—we are up there with London and other parts of the United Kingdom. Post Brexit, therefore, we are in a position to do great good for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This is an opportunity that we should be taking advantage of. Some 77% of post-A-level high
school graduates in Northern Ireland go on to further and higher education, compared with the UK average of 71%. Again, Northern Ireland is leading the way.

All such things make it attractive to come to Northern Ireland. Furthermore, labour and property costs for a 200-person software development centre in Belfast are 36% less than in Dublin, 44% less than in London and 58% less than in New York. We can see the benefits of coming to Belfast and Northern Ireland. Improved connectivity, which is central to this debate, will only enhance our global potential. How can we build on our base and our level of delivery in Northern Ireland and across the whole of the United Kingdom? The motion seeks to highlight the importance of the ability to hop on a plane and get anywhere in the world quickly—the need for competitive APD, to allow us to show the world that we are only a short, cost-effective flight away.

Only aviation can connect the United Kingdom with existing and emerging markets vital to our post-Brexit future, producing and maintaining thousands of jobs, and indeed the thousands more jobs to come. At the moment we have a competitive disadvantage that we cannot afford: we pay more than double the aviation tax of our nearest European trading rival, Germany. The tax on trade hits UK businesses as they seek to expand international trade essential to our post-Brexit future. It acts as a brake on airlines’ developing new routes to the very markets that UK businesses need to reach.

If the Government want to signal that Britain is truly open for business as Brexit approaches, what better way could there be than to cut this tax on trade by at least 50%, to bring us in line and give us an advantage? The high rate of APD is a brake on expanding links with the world, meaning that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland loses out on connectivity opportunities, and it is one of the main reasons why Germany is better connected to South Korea, Japan, China and Brazil than the UK. It should be the other way around and we should be doing something to address that.

Mary Glindon: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is not only about Germany and further abroad? Under the Scotland Act 2016, Scotland is able to go ahead with its air departure tax proposal, which is a reduction of 50%, and that will affect the north-east, with a further bad effect on Northern Ireland in addition to the Dublin effect.

Jim Shannon: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention and her wise words. The Minister has heard what she said, and I agree with her, as others do. We need to have a strategy and policy that move us forward together, so that we can all take advantage of what happens, rather than efforts that are divisive—perhaps the wrong word—or different ways of trying to achieve the same goal. I therefore wholeheartedly support the A Fair Tax on Flying campaign and its call for at least a 50% reduction in air passenger duty. I urge all Members to support the AFTOF campaign.

My mother often urged me not to be penny wise and pound foolish. Many people would say that that is the Ulster Scot in her, and in me—every pound is a prisoner, and we were told to look after it and look after it well. There is nothing wrong with that: thriftiness is good—my children comment on that to me, but that is by the way, and I hope that they learn the lessons that my mother taught me, and that I have tried to teach them. The point is this: we need to focus on the immediate penny, but sometimes we forget the value of the pound. That was what my mum was telling me. We need to look at how we spend better to grow our economy.

From the Minister’s response to various comments, I know that he is sympathetic to our point of view. It has been outlined to me that up to £175,000 can be generated through trade from a high-growth market per average flight added. That is a massive amount of money per flight added, and gives us an idea of our potential to grow.

David Simpson: I am sure my hon. Friend will be as surprised as I was to hear that within five years it is reckoned that Dublin airport will be a strong competitor of Gatwick. At one point that was unimaginable, and it is simply because of APD.

Jim Shannon: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Those are all the arguments and the evidential base from places around us. We should be looking at how such places advance and how we can do so alongside them or do even better.

New daily flights to the eight largest high-growth economies could generate as much as £1 billion in additional trade per year for the economy—that figure multiplied up from the one flight to all the flights together. The economic value of new connections to five Chinese destinations, which I mentioned earlier, will add £16 million to GDP and 530 new jobs. That alone gives an idea of the advantage to be gained there.

I do not want to make a pun, but I urge the Government to consider a pilot scheme—for a methodology whereby we can move things forward. Research by PwC shows that more tax revenue would be raised from other taxes than would be lost from abolition of the APD, with a net £570 million in extra tax receipts in the first fiscal year. Positive benefits through to 2022 could add up to as much as £2 billion in tax receipts additional to the total in the status quo. These are not just enormous figures; they represent our potential growth and what we can do. APD abolition could boost UK GDP by almost 0.46% in the first year, with ongoing benefits up to 2022. The increased economic output associated with abolition could lead to the creation of 61,000 jobs by 2022, which is not very far away. At my age, the years seem to go by quicker, but the fact of the matter is that we would quickly see the advantages.

I join the calls to sincerely urge the Government to reduce APD by at least 50%, to ensure that the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, better together, is more connected to the world, including emerging markets, so that there is increased choice for holidaymakers and to demonstrate that a truly global Britain is open for business. After Brexit, we should be even more open than we are now.

10.10 am

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) on securing the debate, which is very important for the reasons he outlined. I also congratulate the Minister for being in his place this morning—I know how challenging that is at the moment, so well done.
It is very unusual to be in a debate with colleagues from the Democratic Unionist party and find that we agree furiously. In fact, it is a unique experience for me—I could recite many long disagreements—but today, the protracted issue, as the hon. Member for Belfast East rightly said, is the lack of action on APD and the economic barrier that it has put down. He further described it as an arbitrary charge that affects the economy, tourism and connectivity. Northern Ireland and Scotland, and particularly the highlands, which I represent, have something in common: air transport is not a luxury. We do not use it purely for holidays—it is absolutely right to make that point. We do not use it purely for holidays—it is not a luxury. We do not use it purely for holidays—it is part of the public transport mix and very important to us. The hon. Gentleman listed the number of airports affected, but that can be extended throughout the north of England and around the nations of the UK. Scotland is directly affected.

**John Howell:** Within five months, I will have travelled to the US, Aberdeen, Israel, which I came back from yesterday, Lisbon and Nigeria. That is not unusual and is part of what being an MP is about. I am not unusual in the scheme of things in the UK, because that is what my business colleagues are doing. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to make that point.

**Drew Hendry:** Other right hon. and hon. Members will have to make up their minds whether the hon. Gentleman is unusual, but I leave that with them.

As the hon. Member for Belfast East pointed out, the tax does not work as an environmental incentive. It is simply an economic disincentive. The money goes into the general tax pool every year and does not go to tackle the environmental issues other than in the way that any other tax might. There is no direct funneling of that money into environmental initiatives—otherwise there would be significant differences. As he said, all studies show that a reduction in APD would produce a net benefit to the economy.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said that PwC stated that if APD is scrapped, the Treasury will gain. He made the telling point that a Treasury report found that the UK is ranked 135 out of 136 countries in terms the cost to the traveller. That is damming of the cost of air travel through APD. He further pointed out that Ireland scrapped APD in 2014—an independent country making a decision for itself—and tourism shot up by 47%.

The hon. Member for Belfast East introduced a side issue, which I also thoroughly agree on, of cutting VAT rates for tourism. Combined with tackling APD, that would be of huge benefit to areas throughout the nations of the UK where tourism and visitor numbers are extremely important to the local economy. We support that strongly and we would commit to it if the power was with us. On the hon. Gentleman’s closing remarks, I cannot send a Valentine to the Tories because it certainly would not be sincere, but the comment about it being a humorous way to highlight a serious problem is valid.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** Smaller airports suffer disproportionately from APD, such as airports in Scotland and my own airport in Londonderry, where we are trying to get route development money. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that double disadvantage—the difficulty of attracting new routes and APD—needs to be countered and that action should be taken to help?

**Drew Hendry:** I will come on to some specific issues in Scotland, because the picture is different, particularly in the highlands and islands, but the hon. Gentleman’s point is very well made for the rest of the Scotland, where there are direct APD effects.

The hon. Member for Strangford pointed out that it is the highest tax of its kind in the EU. It is worth repeating that the cost in Germany is half. The scandalous figure is that, for long haul, it is the highest tax in the world, which affects tourism. The revelation that the hon. Gentleman sneaks off to use Dublin airport will probably reverberate around his local community.

APD is a competitive disadvantage. ABTA calls it a “tax grab”. The hon. Member for Strangford pointed out that Northern Ireland is losing out on connectivity opportunities. Again, it has that in common with other parts of the nations of the UK. His feeling was that the UK Government should just get on and reduce or scrap APD. We are always grateful for some motherly advice in Parliament—there is nothing more true than penny wise and pound foolish. The UK Government could benefit from a net increase in income from other taxes. The hon. Gentleman pointed out the impact of 61,000 jobs—that is a significant benefit that raises the question of why APD has been allowed to continue so long. Why has it not been addressed?

Air passenger duty is one of the most expensive taxes of its kind in the world, as we have heard. It hampers Scotland’s ability to secure new direct international routes and maintain existing ones. It is simply a regressive tax. Combined with the other unfair tax on our tourism sector—VAT—we face among the highest taxations in the world. An independent report found that reducing air departure tax, as it is called in Scotland, by 50% will boost Scotland’s air connectivity and economic competitiveness.

Encouraging the establishment of new routes, which would enhance business connectivity and inbound tourism, would help to generate sustainable growth. That is why the Scottish Government remain committed to a 50% reduction in ADT by the end of the Scottish Parliament in 2021. We want to get on and deliver it.

We want to abolish ADT entirely when resources allow, but that cannot be delivered until the UK Government and the Scottish Government can ensure that exemptions afforded to the highlands and islands remain. The Scottish Government understand the importance of the exemption. Therefore, the introduction of ADT in Scotland will be deferred until the issue of the highlands and islands exemption is resolved. As a highlands MP, I know only too well that air connectivity is critical for the highlands and islands, and I welcome the Scottish Government’s determination to deliver the best possible outcome for the area. I could not possibly countenance the withdrawal of support for the highlands and islands which, for the reasons I pointed out, would lead to substantial difficulties for people who rely on air transport as part of the public transport mix.

Highlands and islands airports have been exempt from air passenger duty since 2000 because of the area’s low population density and peripherality. The current
APD exemption helps support the viability of commercial air services in the highlands and islands. Without it, we would face reduced flights and the withdrawal of important services to the region. Alternative surface journeys by road, rail or sea are long, particularly for those coming from the islands, whose journeys often include overnight stays or overnight ferry travel.

Recognising the social and economic importance of flights to the region, the Scottish Government have worked to reduce the cost of air travel, but residents of the highlands and islands still pay more than people who live in other regions of the UK. The Scottish Government have worked closely with Transport Scotland, VisitScotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and, crucially, Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd to develop the network at Inverness airport and improve international air connectivity to the region. That has brought new routes, including a British Airways route to Heathrow and a KLM service to Amsterdam, and improved the frequency of existing routes. Similar work has led to the expansion of the air network serving smaller regional airports in the highlands and islands.

The introduction of those new flights has enabled our business and tourism sectors to flourish, but more could be done. We are all too well aware that those connections remain some of the most fragile across these isles. Since being elected in 2015—I served in the last Parliament as Transport spokesperson for the Scottish National party, and I am now its Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy spokesperson—I have consistently made the point that they are crucial to Scotland and to the highlands and islands. That is why the case for the exemption remains, and why the UK Government must provide assurances about route protections and public service obligations in respect of the third runway at Heathrow.

The Minister knows that the Scottish Government cannot implement ADT unless a solution is found to the problem with the exemption. Will the UK Government look at why APD was handed over in a state that put that exemption at risk? The Scottish Government were effectively given responsibility for APD without the power to implement it. What assessment have the UK Government made of the state of APD? What is the Department doing to resolve the issue with the highlands and islands exemption while supporting the Scottish economy? The Minister will be aware that the Scottish Government have convened a new highlands and islands working group, which includes organisations with expert knowledge of the highlands and islands economy. Its first meeting was on 15 June. What support have the UK Government offered that working group?

The Scottish Government want to continue to work with the UK Government to find a solution. While the UK Government continue to set APD rates, they should take the impact on the Scottish economy seriously. As we heard, that impact is also felt by the economies of Northern Ireland and of the other nations of the UK. The Scottish Government were announced last autumn. That is surely positive for the UK Government offered that working group?

The tenor of this debate demonstrates that the starting gun has been fired on that race—it has begun, and we need to know the Government’s response.

I will focus on four issues: the long-term viability of APD, regional competitiveness, the unequal impact of APD on different kinds of flights, and exemptions for children were introduced in 2015 and extended in March 2016.

I beg the hon. Gentleman’s pardon. I am very sorry about that. He will perhaps be even more perplexed when I mention that, rather than pound pinching, my family talked about looking after the pennies and the pounds looking after themselves. Perhaps that reveals a psychological difference between lowland and Ulster Scots. Of course, we need to look after the pennies and the pounds—that is the whole point. We need to trace exactly the impact of APD.

Studies suggest that the evidence about APD’s impact on passenger numbers is mixed. As many Members said, such a duty is unusual in the international context, but the number of passengers using UK airports has increased by 15%—a substantial increase—in the past five years. Of course, APD needs to be considered in the context of there being no tax on aviation fuel and no VAT on domestic or international flights. There are also different levels of APD for different kinds of flights, and exemptions for children were introduced in 2015 and extended in March 2016.

Air P assenger Duty Air P assenger Duty

Sir David. I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) on securing the debate, which has been very inclusive and interesting, and on his illuminating speech.

Many of these issues have been discussed before, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned. They were foreshadowed in our debates about recent Finance Bills, in which I spoke on behalf of the Opposition. Labour argued in those debates that the Government need to be clearer about their long-term plan for APD. There have been a number of reviews of APD’s efficacy, proportionality and impact on competitiveness since its introduction in 1994, and we need to situate this debate in that context. However, despite those reviews, a number of questions still have not been answered, so I hope the Minister provides some indication of the Government’s thinking.

As has been indicated in previous debates on this topic, the Government estimate that APD contributes about £3.1 billion to general taxation. I am well aware that the hon. Gentleman and others suggest that, if one takes a holistic view of its fiscal impact, APD may be fiscally positive on the ledger. It would be helpful to hear from the Minister whether the Treasury is conducting a 360° review of APD’s fiscal impact. I understand that PwC has carried out research, but it would help if the Treasury were focused on this issue, too.

In response to the comments by the hon. Member for Strangford—that’s a step too far!
[Anneliese Dodds]

We must view increases or reductions in APD in the context of taxation generally across income levels. It is notable that, given the increasing popularity and accessibility of air travel, many more people pay APD. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon) said, many more people enjoy hard-earned holidays abroad, and there are also people who need to travel abroad for family or work reasons.

Equally, APD is far less significant for household incomes than VAT, another transaction-based tax, which Members discussed on. We would be in a different situation if the potentially regressive impacts of consumption taxes as a whole were cancelled out by progressive income taxes, for example, but of course the Government reduced the top rate of income tax. The latest Office for National Statistics figures suggest that overall, unusually in Britain’s history—at least in recent times—people in the least well-off decile pay a greater proportion of their income in tax than those in the most well-off decile. That is a peculiar situation.

Another concern we must note is about APD’s impact on regional competitiveness, which has been a focus of the debate and was perhaps its motivation. As we have discussed, APD levels were devolved to the Scottish Government in the Scotland Act 2016 and initial suggestions were that it would be halved and then potentially removed altogether.

We have discussed at length changes mooted in Northern Ireland, where there has been a call for evidence. We got useful detail about the operation of that from the hon. Member for Belfast East. As I understand it, the Government stated in February 2015 that they would also consider the case for devolving APD to the Welsh Assembly. We have therefore seen much change in relation to this duty.

All those changes naturally raise questions for airports contiguous to other airports not subject to the same APD levels, whether they are contiguous to Scotland or to the Republic of Ireland. We heard interesting thoughts on that from the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) and the hon. Members for Upper Bann (David Simpson) and for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). Of course, the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon)—I have got it right this time—gave us a typically passionate and inclusive speech and a glimmer of his holiday plans. I hope they are more sedate and relaxing than those of the hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), whose itinerary of recent movements sent my head into a bit of a spin.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside, who pointed out research suggesting that the duty has a significant impact on people living in her area. She is always a doughty supporter of their interests.

The Treasury published a discussion paper on options to support English regional airports in July 2015, but it is difficult to find out what concrete steps have occurred since then. Furthermore, the Government have said they will look at the matter once legislation concerning state aid changes is produced. An indication from the Minister of the Government’s thinking on that would be helpful; it is particularly important, given the points made by the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) about the situation for the highlands and islands.

There is often confusion in this place, though certainly not on the hon. Gentleman’s part, about the impact of EU state aid provisions in general. Of course, they prevent the provision of arbitrary support, but, as he suggested, low levels of population could be a feasible basis for such an exemption.

Drew Hendry: The hon. Lady makes the point well. This is an exemption based on population density and the regional difficulties in the highlands and islands. Indeed, it should be possible—I hope it is—for the Scottish and UK Governments to work together to solve that problem.

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): We are.

Anneliese Dodds: I was pleased to hear the Minister say from a sedentary position that they are working on that. I hope the UK Government will do so with rather more application than they did on support for the steel sector, of which I had an inside view as a Member of the European Parliament: they made no attempt to secure clearance for the kind of support we saw applied in countries such as Romania, which had been okayed by the European Commission; they asked the Competition Commissioner for exemption only from environmental measures. There was not much application around steel, so I hope we will see a different approach to these matters.

Another concern is the impact of APD on Britons who have family living outside the British Isles. The previous four-bandung system meant that such individuals could end up paying more APD than those travelling to the US, for example. None the less, the division in the calculation between short and long-haul travel continues to be criticised by some who feel that that disadvantages Brits with families in, for example, the Caribbean, India, Pakistan or Bangladesh, who need to fly long haul to visit them. One could argue that other, lower carbon alternatives are available to flying for short-haul journeys, which do not apply for travelling long distances. An indication of the Government’s thinking on that would be helpful.

Our final concern is about APD’s impact, or otherwise, on environmental outcomes. In response to a question posed by the hon. Member for Henley, the hon. Member for Belfast East maintained that APD does not have a positive environmental impact. However, we must look at it in the context of enormous public concern around climate change and the increasing significance of emissions from aviation. At APD’s introduction in 1994 and, following that, the Labour Government’s focus on it, there was an attempt to ensure that its design would have a green impact. For example, during the 2007 Budget process it was stated that APD “plays a valuable role in ensuring that passengers understand and acknowledge the environmental costs of their actions. The resultant behaviour change can deliver significant climate change benefits”.

Those believed benefits were then detailed.

Gavin Robinson: I hope that the hon. Lady does not misconstrue what I said as a suggestion that we are not interested in climate change. The Library briefing is
helpful, talking about the Labour Government in 2006 and a Department for Transport recalibration of emissions, which were to increase and not decrease until 2030. I do not think consumers realise that the contribution is made for environmental benefit or that it is having any tangible impact. The growth of aviation technology will have a much bigger impact on environmental benefits than an APD charge.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. I acknowledge that there is not necessarily the awareness to ensure that it does have such an impact. Some of the matters he just raised have led to calls for a redesign of the duty, which some believe could lead to a greater environmental impact. One suggestion, which was examined in 1998, was whether it would be better to levy the duty on planes rather than passengers to reduce under-occupancy and lessen emissions. However, the then Government suggested that a restructuring of APD would be more appropriate and the four bands were introduced. Of course, since then we have gone down to two bands.

It is interesting to note that the highly interventionist right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood)—he is not often described as that—argued that, on reducing under-occupancy through such a measure, "there is a green case to be made there."—[Official Report, 23 April 2007; Vol. 459, c. 729.]

However, the practicalities of doing so are highly complex, which may be why that did not develop at that time. In particular, it is difficult to exempt transit and transfer passengers from the calculation, which led Alistair Darling away from initial moves in that direction.

The taxation of aircraft fuel has been mentioned as an alternative, but that is prevented by the network of bilateral air service agreements under the principles of the Chicago convention. It would be helpful to hear whether the Minister has been involved in attempts afoot internationally to alter that agreement to provide more flexibility.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way yet again. She is talking about alternatives for taxation. Does she agree that had APD been used directly for environmental measures, it would have had a huge impact? For example, it could have been involved in the creation of alternative biofuels and other incentives and operations to reduce dramatically the environmental impact, yet it has not been spent in that way at all.

Anneliese Dodds: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that interesting point. Hypothecation of tax is relatively unusual in the UK. My party believes—he will expect me to say this—that there needs to be much more investment in those technologies. That would be positive for our country, whether funds are hypothecated from a particular area or found through other mechanisms.

One other aspect of the international context—this was mentioned to me by a Minister—is the ICAOs agreement on the carbon offsetting and reduction scheme for international aviation, which was introduced in October 2016. Members have referred to the EU’s emissions trading scheme in that context, but we have not yet heard from the Government about whether we will remain part of the ETS beyond 2020. If we follow existing patterns for APD, Parliament will set the rate for 2021 next autumn. It would be helpful to get a clearer idea about how the Government view international schemes such as that of the ICAO interacting with multilateral mechanisms such as the ETS. The general lack of clarity on environmental matters amplifies the fact that the UK Government seem to lack any long-term vision about what constitutes green taxation in the first place, let alone how it should develop in future. This is a bit of a cheesy point, but I contrast that with the shadow Treasury team, which includes a shadow Minister who is focused exactly on such matters, and on the link between environmental and Treasury issues.

In conclusion, I am afraid that I lack the poetic sensibilities and contacts of the hon. Member for Belfast East, but I congratulate him again on securing this debate. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about the five issues I raised: whether there will be a 360° review of APD; whether there is a long-term plan for it; what the Government’s view is about the substitutability of short-term flights, and whether that should be taken into account; whether the Government are participating in international attempts to reform the Chicago convention; and what their view is of the interaction between the ICAO scheme and the ETS, and what the future will hold for carbon trading for the UK beyond 2020—that point is very germane to this debate.

10.42 am

The Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury (Robert Jenrick): I congratulate the hon. Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson) on securing this debate. I have known him since he and I were elected and have always been fond of him, but I was not expecting a belated Valentine’s day present. I vaguely remember that some time ago the hon. Members for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) presented a giant heart-shaped card to No. 11. I wonder whether the Chancellor’s predecessor regrets not taking the advice on it. Flattery will get you everywhere at the Treasury, so I am grateful for that.

We have had a productive debate and it has been interesting to hear from all sides. There is significant agreement across the House that we view the UK aviation sector as extremely important to our quality of life and for creating jobs, and particularly for connectivity within our United Kingdom and beyond. There is no more important time for us to consider both how we can bring the United Kingdom closer together, and how we can make ourselves more open to the outside world. This is therefore a timely debate. Let me say a few words about APD and aviation in general, and then I will turn to Northern Ireland and try to answer, assuming time allows, many of the reasonable and important points raised. If I cannot do so, I will write to the relevant Members.

The UK aviation sector is a strong performer and we are a world leader in that industry. We have the third largest aviation network in the world, and since 2010 passenger numbers at UK airports have grown by more than 20%. That strength extends across the entire UK, not just at major airports such as Heathrow. Regional airports are growing and handled approximately 113 million passengers last year. There is good news across the sector.

Regional airports have been the basis of this debate. They make a valuable contribution to the growth of local economies and support connectivity across the
UK. We appreciate that and want it to continue. We must also appreciate that aviation plays its part—like all industries—in contributing to the Exchequer. We heard various epithets about looking after pennies and not being penny-wiser and pound-poorer, and we appreciate that. The Treasury wants to ensure that we meet our commitments to public services and to continue to address the deficit and the debt.

We also want to pursue policies that will increase economic growth, in which tax has a role. As the hon. Member for Oxford East (Anneliese Dodds) said, in line with our international treaty commitments, we do not tax commercial aviation fuel and no VAT is charged on airline tickets. It is important that that part of the economy plays its part in funding public services, which was why the Government introduced air passenger duty in 1994. Without that duty, commercial aviation would be relatively undertaxed compared with other industries.

Air passenger duty raises around £3.2 billion a year, which is a significant amount of money. It would be foolish of the Treasury not to take that seriously and to proceed without great caution. That is why we are proceeding with the introduction of a call for evidence, which I will discuss in a moment. We appreciate the arguments that were made eloquently by the hon. Member for Belfast East—those points were also made by Democratic Unionist Members who spoke after him and by many other Members across the House, including those from the north-east, the west country, Wales and Scotland. We are alive to those concerns and I hope I can provide further detail about the steps that we are taking.

We are conscious that APD is often passed on to passengers as part of their ticket fares. This is not a tax on passengers—it is a tax on airlines—but in many cases it feeds through to the cost of tickets. In recent years we have tried to minimise the impact of APD on hard-working families to ensure that those who can afford to pay more do so. Last year we announced that rates will stay frozen for the sixth year in a row for the 80% of passengers who fly short-haul. That will help to keep down the cost of holidays for the vast majority of travellers, including those who travel throughout the United Kingdom for business or other reasons. We have exempted children from APD, which could save a family of four £26 on a short-haul flight and £156 on long-haul flights. Together those actions reduced the burden of APD by about £300 million pounds in the last financial year alone.

We have increased APD on private jets to ensure that those with the deepest pockets pay their fair share, and we are using those proceeds to fund some of the savings for families and holiday travel. I hope Members agree that, alongside those reforms, the Government have demonstrated their strong commitment to the aviation sector more generally, which was exemplified most recently by decisive action to address capacity constraints in the south-east. The new Heathrow expansion will provide capacity for an additional 260,000 flights a year and deliver an extra 16 million long-haul seats for passengers travelling from UK airports by 2040. I hope and believe that it will also be beneficial for all regional airports in the UK, including those in Northern Ireland and Scotland. We heard the Secretary of State’s important commitments on Heathrow and want them delivered. Additional capacity at Heathrow is expected to bring a boost of up to £74 billion to passengers and the wider economy over the next 60 years and we want that delivered at pace.

The Government are not blind to calls from the industry and over the years, including during my relatively brief time as a Minister, we have met a number of airports stakeholders. As a result of discussions with the DUP, we decided to create a call for evidence—I have received and read the representation from the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) on behalf of his party. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury has already visited Northern Ireland to meet stakeholders, including representatives from the airports, so that we can take seriously and listen directly to concerns about APD and VAT.

We are concerned to proceed with care in these matters, first because of the significant amounts of revenue for the Exchequer that are at stake, but also because, as we have heard during this nuanced debate, there are currently complexities regarding EU state aid guidelines. That situation may continue depending on the ultimate agreement that we reach with the European Union—in a moment I will come on to the position in Scotland, where those complexities have come out most vividly in recent months and years.

We keep the matter under review. The call for evidence has now closed. The Chancellor, Treasury officials and I will carefully consider the arguments submitted by many stakeholders in Northern Ireland. We expect to offer a response in the Budget in October or November. I hope we can continue conversations once we have carefully analysed the evidence submitted.

Clearly the tourism industry is important in Northern Ireland, as it is in all parts of the United Kingdom, and we appreciate that the Northern Ireland economy is still in recovery mode and that it requires our wholehearted support to continue to grow. Tourism in Northern Ireland has been growing significantly in recent years, as there is so much to offer there. We appreciate the unique position of Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom with respect to economic competitiveness. It is the only part of the Union that shares a land border with another state—the Republic—which poses a number of challenges, one of which relates to airports. Anyone who visits Northern Ireland and understands its economy will appreciate the impact on passenger numbers, business and other passenger choices of the fact that there are other airports within easy driving distance. We shall consider those points carefully in the coming months.

We have read the various reports hon. Members have quoted. We do not necessarily agree with all their findings, but the purpose of the call for evidence that has just closed is to build our own significant evidence base, to enable us to arrive at our own view. It may not be exactly the same view as the independent reports, but we intend to take a detailed, careful decision.

I will deal briefly with other points made in the debate. EU state aid rules, which are relevant to Scotland, have proved complex. As I said from a sedentary position—the hon. Member for Oxford East picked it up—we are working productively with the Scottish Government, which I should like to continue. I would be happy to discuss after the debate or on another occasion how we can step up those efforts. The Government passed the legislation recommended by the Smith commission in
2014 that devolved APD to Scotland. Implementation has been delayed, as the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) described, because it has proved difficult to square the circle as to how the measure would apply to the highlands and islands. I am sure the hon. Gentleman wishes for a settlement to be reached. We shall continue to work closely together and when it is eventually implemented we will bear in mind how it works in other parts of the United Kingdom, including for the airports closest to the Scottish border.

As the hon. Member for Oxford East mentioned, we have in the past looked into the impact of air passenger duty on regional airports in England. There was at that time no consensus about how to proceed. We analysed the various recommendations carefully. There were no easy answers and different airports came up with different and often competing proposals, but we remain open to further suggestions and are in constant conversation, as Members might expect, with airports, stakeholders and Members of Parliament who want to take the matter forward.

As was mentioned in the debate, we have had a discussion with the Welsh Government about the devolution of air passenger duty to Wales. Careful consideration led to the conclusion, which was respected by many if not all the stakeholders, that Cardiff airport was essentially within the same air economy as Bristol airport, and that it was necessary to proceed very carefully before changing the regime for Cardiff in view of the knock-on effect on Bristol. However, we shall continue to think carefully about whether there is a way around that situation. We should not want to harm Bristol inadvertently by creating a competitive advantage for Cardiff.

There are already powers for devolved Governments to take action on route development funds. I appreciate the current difficulties in Northern Ireland in taking that forward, but were the Executive there to resume, they would have the capacity to proceed and implement a route development fund for Northern Ireland. The Government in Wales also have powers to take action because they own Cardiff airport. They could act to develop it further from its current relatively small number of passengers—it is about 1.5 million a year, whereas there are 8 million at Bristol, its nearest competitor.

There is still no easy definition of long and short-haul flights. We have allotted on a definition of a short-haul flight as one where the capital—not necessarily the relevant airport—of the destination country is within 2,000 miles of the UK airport. The effect of that is to take in all European Union countries, plus most Mediterranean-facing countries, with one or two exceptions that are arguably anomalies, such as Israel and Egypt. The vast majority of countries bordering the Mediterranean fall within the definition, and it seems broadly logical. There is no perfect definition.

On the environmental points made, we are interested in treaty obligations. Perhaps there is an opportunity to take action on a multilateral basis. I do not think that that is being pursued today, but I am happy to look into the matter and revert to the hon. Member for Oxford East. As I said, we have taken action against private jets, which are less environmentally friendly and may at times be under-occupied. It has proved complex and difficult to take action on under-occupied flights. HMRC has done significant work on that and no simple solution has been found. Today the duty is paid by airlines, not passengers, so there would need to be significant change to the tax to implement that.

I hope I have answered some of the questions that hon. Members raised. If there are further points, I am happy to discuss them afterwards. I want to leave the hon. Member for Belfast East with my and the Chancellor’s reassurance that, in the months ahead, we will work carefully through the submissions in response to the call for evidence. We will listen to the arguments of the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, which appear to have significant support from other parts of the House, and before the Budget we shall present our careful response. In the meantime I shall be happy to discuss the issue further should he or his colleagues want that.

10.57 am

Gavin Robinson: This has been a productive debate. We may not be many in number, but we were ably assisted by the hon. Members for Henley (John Howell) and for North Tyneside (Mary Glindon), and by the Front-Bench contributors. I have enjoyed listening—the speeches were thoughtful and full of detail, which is how a debate should be.

I am grateful to the Minister for his commitment to engage in the interim and to present a response to the call for evidence in October. He is right that we have the powers for a route development fund, but that misses the point that, if the Treasury were to permit the introduction of previously non-serviced routes where no APD is applied, not only would there be freedom to grow those routes, but it would be demonstrated to the Treasury that there is a benefit in not having APD associated with them. It is slightly different: if the Executive used their powers, APD would be charged for those routes.

We are one of a few European Union countries with APD. We have heard in the debate about the benefits for Ireland and the Netherlands from scrapping it. There has been exponential growth in their economies as a direct result. We are the only European Union country, out of 28 member states, where connectivity has declined. We need to think about the reasons for that and work productively to see what we can do to encourage growth in business, aviation and the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered air passenger duty throughout the UK.
2015 Steel Summit Commitments

[SIR DAVID CRAUSBY in the Chair]

10.59 am

Anna Turley (Redcar) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move, That this House has considered progress on 2015 steel summit commitments.

It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am pleased to have secured this debate, which comes almost three years on from the 2015 steel summit. At that summit, in the midst of the steel crisis, steel producers, steelworkers, trade unions and parliamentarians came together with Government to discuss the challenges facing the industry and the support needed to at least level the playing field. We were not looking for special favours or advantages, just a fair environment so that British steel makers were not fighting against state-subsidised steel from east Asia or excessive energy costs compared with our competitors in Europe.

My constituents in Redcar felt the sharp end of that battle when the SSI steelworks and coke ovens were closed. Cheap Chinese steel had put the works under strain from falling prices, but it was Government inaction, in the face of pleas from parliamentarians, industry and the Community trade union, that left the works in a battle for survival. The closure wiped out 3,000 jobs and many more in the supply chain, rippling across our local economy.

Redcar is resilient and we are fighting back, but many families continue to struggle, working on lower wages in insecure jobs, working away or not working at all. Many come to my surgeries or visit the local citizens advice bureau, struggling with mortgages and personal debt. I do not repeat that story to dwell on the past, but to highlight why it is so important that the steel industry gets the support it needs to thrive. We cannot countenance any more reductions in steelmaking capacity in the UK after the loss of 175 years of steelmaking on Teesside. We cannot be complacent, as before, about the loss of any more steel jobs.

To return to the 2015 summit, there was a united request in the form of five asks, or five areas where the industry was struggling to remain sustainable, often because we were at a disadvantage compared with our competitors around the world. We were playing fair, but the playing field was tilted against us. I am speaking in the past tense, but sadly not enough progress has been made on those asks since 2015. The playing field is still uneven and tilted against British steel. While the existential urgency of the 2015 crisis may have passed, my town stands as a warning of what can happen if complacency sets in and the industry is not given the support it needs to survive.

Stephen Kinnock (Aberavon) (Lab): On the point my hon. Friend makes about what happened in Redcar, does she agree that the closure of the blast furnace and coke ovens there was an act of industrial vandalism that led to the loss of a strategic asset for our country? Does she also agree that the steel industry needs to be seen as a strategic asset and in the context of our national security?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is right. It was the second-largest blast furnace in Europe and the coke ovens were fantastic; they were capable of producing more, including four more coke, for which there was a huge market. It had a huge role still to play in the British steel sector, and we did not have a strategic nationwide approach to looking at those assets and preserving the value they had for our economy and for the future. I know many hon. Friends here want to contribute and share their thoughts and experiences, so I will not take too much time, but I will just give an overview of where we were and where we are now.

First, I will start with electricity costs. We asked for help with bringing the cost of electricity in line with that of our EU counterparts. In 2015, the Government introduced compensation for energy-intensive industries a few months earlier than planned, but a large disparity between electricity prices in the UK and the EU still remains. It translates into a total additional cost to UK steel producers of around £43 million per year, or around 17% of the sector’s net earnings, which is a significant margin to be losing in excessive energy costs. Europe offers many examples of acceptable state aid solutions to the energy challenge, but the Government have not given any serious consideration to what we can do.

Secondly, I come to business rates, which irk sectors across the UK, not just steel. The sector has put forward a number of proposals, such as removing plant and machinery from business rates calculations or offsetting previous trading losses against future business rates, but change in this area has been met by resistance, even though the sector has committed to reinvesting any savings, which would have a huge impact on local steel-producing regions. That feels like a short-sighted approach from the Government, ignoring a powerful tool for incentivising capital investment, increasing the productivity of the sector and helping to deliver a northern powerhouse boost.

Thirdly, public procurement is another area where the UK has so much potential to support UK steel makers, especially through large infrastructure projects such as HS2 and the Heathrow expansion. I know that British Steel in my constituency has aspirations to win contracts on those projects, and many other colleagues will have similar ambitions for their areas. There has been a close working relationship between the sector and Government on procurement.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have missed a real opportunity for UK plc generally, and for steel in particular, with their decision to refuse the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend makes a vital point, not just in terms of opportunities in that area for the creation of jobs and the boosting of the local economy, but in terms of the huge implications for the steel industry that we know such major infrastructure projects have in keeping that pipeline going.

The publication of an annual steel pipeline to provide early sight of such opportunities for UK producers has revealed over 4 million tonnes of steel requirements in the coming years. The publication of the procurement policy note on procuring steel in major projects has also helped to encourage a more holistic and proactive approach
to steel procurement. Despite these steps forward, the benefits of this relatively low-cost way of subsidising UK steel and jobs are not being maximised. The guidance is interpreted differently by different Departments and organisations, and information sharing is still far too limited. Clearer and more detailed data on the amount of UK steel in public projects would be a welcome improvement, to track progress and to ensure it is held up to the light of public scrutiny. Introducing a baseline for levels of steel in UK projects would also help to maximise the benefits to domestic steel production.

Fourthly, trade remedies have been an incredibly important defence mechanism in the battle against state-subsidised steel, which is flooding the market and forcing down prices.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that, in the light of the American steel tariffs, there is a real danger that steel that has hitherto been going to the US will be diverted and dumped on to the British market, and that the current UK policy is going in the wrong direction, unlike that of the European Union, which is going in the correct direction?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right; I know colleagues have raised that issue a number of times with the Secretary of State for International Trade. The implications of the steel tariffs that President Trump has announced are not just a direct existential challenge to our steel industry here; the knock-on effect of further dumping from the Chinese market and others into our market is a real crisis coming down the line.

Such unfair trading practices put UK steel at a disadvantage for trading fairly without a single bit of state support. Thanks to work within the EU, dumping methodology has been reformed and a modernised regime has had a big impact in reducing the levels of dumped steel in the EU market. It is a real worry that, when we leave the EU, the UK will not endorse the same kinds of protection and the UK steel market could be in danger of being swamped. The UK Government’s unexplainable opposition to the modernisation package within Europe suggests that they will not introduce the same approach in the UK system post-Brexit. The proposals so far suggest there could be a much more difficult and drawn-out process for initiating defence measures, by which time the damage would have been done.

Gareth Snell (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. As someone from a ceramics area, the issues she is talking about resonate with the industries I talk to. Does she share my concern that not only do the Government seem not to want to commit to the European calculations for dumping, but the introduction of an economic interest test and a public interest test gives further opportunities for Ministers to take away the protections, even if they were to update the methodology themselves?

Anna Turley: My hon. Friend is right. It is vital that we all contribute, and that the Government listen to the debate as we produce the legislation and look to leave the EU.

Our fifth ask was on environmental regulations, which is one area where there has been positive progress, allowing more time for specific sites to meet the requirements
11.12 am

The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. It was also a pleasure, as is often the case, to listen to the hon. Member for Redcar (Anna Turley), who is my friend and who speaks so passionately on these matters. I congratulate her on securing the debate. It is always good to see such a doughty group of campaigners for this vital industry.

The hon. Lady will know, as will her colleagues, that I visited her constituency and saw for myself the shock caused by the closure of what was once an exceptionally large and productive plant and the concern expressed by people who had lost highly productive jobs that were critical to the UK’s economy. She also knows that the Government, and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington), who has responsibility for the sector, want to do everything that we can to ensure the return of those jobs. She has done wonderful work in her constituency, ably supported by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), other parts of her region and its mayor, to reopen that site as part of the new, low-carbon economy. I am in no doubt about the passion with which she speaks and of what a hammer blow that closure was for employees, their families and the whole region.

The hon. Lady is right to raise what has happened since the closure. That was clearly a momentous time for the industry, and some tough questions had to be answered by the Government and the industry, working together. There have been signs of progress. We have seen a recovery in the world price of steel. The UK has benefited from the decline in the value of our currency, which has made our exports more competitive. However, we are under no illusions about the difficulty of the international market, which we will raise with President Trump when he visits us this weekend.

We are all deeply and profoundly disappointed with the section 232 tariffs. Huge amounts of work have happened behind the scenes to try to focus the US on potentially legitimate concerns about over-capacity production in China, rather than on penalising its closest allies and their industries. Those conversations have happened—my hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade raised it directly with the US Secretary of Commerce last week. We will continue to make the case for a UK and EU exemption to the tariffs. We have shared legal support on these exemption questions with UK firms and with the industry, and we are pressing hard on behalf of those companies for assurances on the product exclusion process.

Those are the direct impacts of the tariffs. The indirect impact can have a chilling effect on the supply chain, which we are aware of. Indeed, we voted in the EU in support of provisional measures to curb steel imports only last Thursday. We will continue to offer a doughty response, which we must do on behalf of British-based companies.

That 2015 plant closure was such a pivotal moment. We received the five asks of the steel industry, which looked not only at what could be done in the short term but also at the long-term outlook for those companies. A number of changes to the industry’s structure have happened since. Greybull Capital acquired Tata’s long products business, which is based in Scunthorpe and is now part of the British Steel group. The Scottish mills have reopened under the ownership of Liberty Steel, which also bought Tata’s speciality steel business, based in Sheffield and Rotherham.

We should all be pleased to see the Tata-thyssenkrupp venture in Port Talbot coming to fruition. I visited it myself and saw the pride in that long tradition of steelmaking. I pay tribute to the management and the unions, who worked so hard in making that deal happen. Securing those jobs was vital. The deal was accompanied by the decision to invest in the blast furnace. The company will now work to ensure the commitment that as much as possible will be done to avoid any compulsory redundancies until 2026. I have to pay tribute to the pool of highly skilled workers who are dedicated to the future of the industry. We are incredibly lucky to have them.

However, the Government have done our bit, too. We set up our industrial strategy. The hon. Member for Redcar rightly raised energy costs. The Dieter Helm review that we commissioned found that, while our energy companies pay more than some of their European counterparts, it is often because other countries decide to spread those costs to consumers’ bills.

Stephen Kinnock: I recommend that the Minister looks at the “Steel 2020” report produced by the all-party parliamentary group on steel and metal related industries. It contains a detailed road map on what can be done on energy, including on wholesale costs, network and transmission costs, energy efficiency aid, reform of the emissions trading system and long-term remodelling. Will she update us on what the Government are doing, and whether she has had a chance to look at the report?

Claire Perry: I am happy to read the primary source. I have seen many of those recommendations, which inform our response to the Helm review.

I was making the point that other countries have taken policy decisions to put the costs that would in this country be borne by industrial customers on to household bills. We have ended up in a situation in which some of our industrial energy bills are higher than average, but our household bills are lower than average. Those policy levers are difficult to change; we all support, for example, the energy price cap Bill that we will bring forward later this week.

However, as the hon. Member for Redcar pointed out, we have spent more than £250 million in compensation specifically for the steel sector and other energy-intensive industries to help to mitigate those policy costs as we transition to a low-carbon future. We successfully pressed for the introduction of trade defence instruments to protect UK steel producers from unfair dumping. We set out visibility on the pipeline going forward, which I know was a big ask from hon. Members in the room.

The Government plan to procure construction contracts that will use 3 million tonnes of UK steel over the next five years, which is enough to build 170 Wembley stadiums. I understand the comment from the hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Angela Smith) on the Swansea bay tidal lagoon. Believe me, I worked so hard on those numbers, but to build the country’s most expensive ever power station basically to create a couple of dozen jobs was just not economically effective when compared with other opportunities in all our constituencies.
The power of Government procurement should not be underestimated. Every Government steel contract in England is now required to consider its social and economic impact on local communities and what those decisions mean for the constituencies we are all so proud to represent.

We are grateful for the constructive proposals put forward by the steel council, I asked for guidance on this. The steel council, which I was proud to chair when I was the relevant Minister, met last in June and will meet again before September. It now meets regularly, and that is an opportunity to discuss the current challenges but also for the industry to work together. Historically, members of the industry have not sat around a table and worked together on the outlook and productivity investments; it has had a very competitive mindset. The industry working together and with Government is a very important part of the plan as we go forward.

Nic Dakin: The Minister is setting out her stall very well, but as she has said, most of the benefits that we have at the moment are down to global changes and the restructuring that the industry has done itself. The assistance on energy prices was in train before the steel crisis in 2015. Since the crisis, there has been some progress on procurement, but frankly the steel sector deal, which the Government have always been positive about and have said is the way to address the steel crisis issues and the five asks, has not yet delivered. Will the Minister tell us where we are on delivering a sector deal for steel and, indeed, whether that will happen? Is it just a case of officials preventing Ministers from doing their job?

Claire Perry: No, no—far from it. The hon. Gentleman invites me to move on to the next part of my response, which is about exactly this issue. One of the first parts of the sector deal is getting the sector to work together to say, “What is it that we collectively need going forward?” We had the “Future Capacities and Capabilities of the UK Steel Industry” report produced at the request of the industry, the Government paid for it with taxpayers’ money. It highlighted onshore opportunities that will be worth up to £4 billion a year by 2030. This is about the demand and continuing to invest in higher-quality steels, higher-quality steels or steels that can support the investments in the offshore wind industry—things that are now being imported. That opportunity exists for the UK plants and it is forming part of the sector deal.

As I have urged hon. Members to recognise before, we should not use the steel sector deal as a measure of how much the Government love the sector. The idea is not to have Government write it and say, “This is what you need to do.” It is for the industry to come together and set out what it needs and wants from Government. We have seen the publication of sector deals that directly benefit the industry that we are talking about. The automotive sector deal was an early one out of the traps. The automotive industry has already increased its use of UK-made content. That went up from 36% previously to 44% two years ago, and the aim is to reach 50% or more by 2022, as a direct result of the sector deal. The construction sector is a vital market for many of the steel products in this country, and we published the construction sector deal last Thursday. It aims to build homes and offices quicker than in the past and it also has commitments in relation to domestic content.

We are absolutely committed to securing a steel sector deal that works for Government, industry and employees. It would be unfair to blame any delay on my hard-working officials. This is about getting the right deal—one that is not just a simple request for money but is saying, “What are we collectively going to do to increase productivity and competitiveness, so we can invest again in these steel plants and create jobs in these important areas?”

Angela Smith: I do not agree with the Minister’s comments about the tidal bay lagoon, but there are other aspects of UK manufacturing where a sector deal could play a real part. The development of the shale gas industry is one of those. Can the right hon. Lady update us on progress made in maximising UK steel content in the shale gas industry?

Claire Perry: That is an excellent point. The hon. Lady will know that I am keen for us to have an energy policy that delivers secure, affordable, low-carbon and innovative energy. I believe that onshore shale gas can play a part in that, and we are soberly going through the process of testing the wells. She raises an important point about ensuring that that work is done using UK steel content. I will take that away for my conversations with the companies, but I did hold a very effective shale industry roundtable, at which I was struck by the number of small companies that are making the pipes and specialty products that rely on UK steel and the opportunities for them, so the hon. Lady makes an excellent point.

I again reassure colleagues here today that work is going on on the sector deal, but we have to encourage the companies that we are working with and that provide so many jobs in the constituencies represented here to think about what they will do. There are positive signs. We are seeing steel companies investing in very good research and development. Companies are bidding for money from our industrial strategy challenge fund—the current wave—for more innovative products, and that is incredibly important going forward.

Nick Dakin: UK Steel was disappointed with the Government’s response to the sector deal proposals so far—not because there are not weaknesses in what it has put forward that it is aware of, but because the things that were highlighted were not, bluntly, weaknesses. There needs to be a proper dialogue going on that delivers an outcome. How long does the Minister think it will be before we have a sector deal for steel?

Claire Perry: I will not speak for the Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford, who chairs the steel council and is closely involved in the conversations, but I urge the hon. Gentleman to think about the outcome, not the timing. We recognise the importance of the industry. We are setting out plans to ensure that its products can be sold into other UK sectors as part of those deals. I am confident that we will get there, but the steel sector deal has to be a deal that works for the long-term future and is not a quick fix. I think that all of us would say that putting another sticking plaster over the problems that we saw in 2015 would not be the way to secure the jobs of the future. We know that there is a huge opportunity from UK—domestic—clients wanting to buy these products, and we have to help the industry to find a way to get there.
Anna Turley: I appreciate the Minister’s response to that question and her update on the steel council; I am glad that it is meeting regularly. I just want to go back to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Nic Dakin), in his first intervention in the debate, about the option of putting together another steel summit. I feel that the time for that is now. Particularly if the sector deal is struggling, getting everyone together and getting everything on the table might just help to facilitate it.

Claire Perry: In my closing remarks, I was going to address the hon. Lady’s point on that, because I think we have made progress in ensuring a sustainable and competitive future for UK steel. However, we cannot be complacent. We know that there are global challenges that affect the sector dramatically. We have made progress on improving the competitiveness and innovation of the industry, and it is really heartening to see that we have these brilliant companies wanting to do the R&D and innovation in the UK. With global or European companies, that has not always been the case: they have made decisions to make certain sorts of products here, but to keep the R&D and intellectual capital elsewhere.

We will continue to work in partnership with the steel sector. This involves not just the companies, but the unions, the devolved Administrations and other stakeholders—in particular, the local communities. I will raise with the Under-Secretary the question of whether the time is right for another steel summit, particularly in the light of international events. Ideally, it would be when we have some progress to report back from the conversations that we are having at a diplomatic level.

I close by thanking sincerely the hon. Members present for raising these issues once again and by assuring them that there is no complacency and we are all dedicated to this vital strategic industry.

Question put and agreed to.

285WH 2015 Steel Summit Commitments

10 JULY 2018

Leaving the EU: Customs Arrangements

[MR GARY STREETER in the Chair]

2.30 pm

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered customs arrangements after the UK leaves the EU.

It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair this afternoon, Mr. Streeter. I am particularly grateful to have been selected to lead this debate. I led a debate on the European Free Trade Association and the European economic area in February, which I believe has brought that argument and some of the arguments around it to the fore. I see this debate as very much part of an evolving evaluation of the necessary arrangements that our country will need to put in place to secure free trade with the European Union and the rest of the world post-March 2019.

This debate on customs arrangements follows and builds on what I was saying in February, because in my view, EEA-EFTA takes us some way towards achieving the aim of frictionless trade with the European Union post-Brexit, but without the satisfactory customs arrangements there will still be barriers to prevent our achieving that. That has been demonstrated to anyone who has spoken to the Norwegians and the Swedes, the Americans and the Canadians, and the Swiss. Anyone who suggests that those borders operate frictionlessly at the moment would be under a misapprehension.

I recognise, as I said to one or two colleagues as I wandered in, that today’s debate takes place in a vacuum. On Friday, the Government announced their ambition, which I welcome, for an EU-UK free trade area for goods, with a common rulebook and a labour mobility framework. The vacuum on the other side is that we are yet to see the much-awaited White Paper. I hope the Minister will confirm, despite all the rumours that have been swirling around this morning, that the White Paper will be published on Thursday.

I want to concentrate on those customs arrangements. Much of the debate about our post-Brexit customs arrangements has been about style over substance. Whether it is “the” or “a” customs union, max fac, new customs partnership or a facilitated customs arrangement, frankly, I do not care what it is called. As far as I am concerned, it can be called anything you like. The test must be whether the customs arrangements that we put in place protect jobs and businesses, avoid a hard border in Ireland, allow for frictionless trade and reflect the realities of the ports of our country. That is why I have always supported the Prime Minister’s customs plan as stated in the Lancaster House speech, in which, I remind colleagues, she said:

“Whether that means we must reach a completely new customs agreement, become an associate member of the Customs Union in some way, or remain a signatory to some elements of it, I hold no preconceived position. I have an open mind on how we do it. It is not the means that matter, but the ends.”

That is clearly true. It is not the means that matter, but the end.

The risks facing businesses, if we do not get this right, are clear. First, and overwhelmingly, in terms of customs, there is “rules of origin” risk and the requirements that
places on trade. Those are most significant for exporters, if we do not come up with a satisfactory solution. The rules of origin requirements prove the country of origin for a product and they are essential for qualifying for lower tariffs. They are established to ensure that a finished good, and anything going into it from the supply chain, comes from the area that it is stated to have come from. Only then will it qualify to move across the border, and qualify for the tariff regime that is established for it. They are also needed to ensure that tariffs are not avoided by shipping goods through a country with a lower tariff, which could undermine the tariff regime.

When it comes to exporting food, proving origin can be quite simple: it is either grown in a country or it is not; but when it comes to the export of cars, for example, it is extraordinarily complex. The composition of each nut and bolt needs to be assessed, to ensure that enough of the car's origin allows it to qualify for the lower tariffs. That affects not only the car industry, but pretty much any industry with a complex supply chain.

**Hywel Williams** (Arfon) (PC): That is even more the case with aircraft wings. The Airbus plants in north-east Wales have a central part in the Welsh economy. Components cross EU internal borders several times before finally being assembled. The danger is extreme to our local economy, as well as our participation in the wider project.

**Stephen Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is completely right and he guesses my next point. I was about to say that rules of origin should not be underestimated or lightly dismissed with the usual line that these issues were not a problem before we joined the EU, or by the extraordinary assertion—heard last week—that manufacturers would somehow be able to get cheaper components from somewhere else in the world. To return to my fabled car, in the 1970s, before we joined the European Union—or the European Economic Community, as it was then—a car made in the west midlands had its supply chain solely from that area. Now, as the hon. Gentleman is rightly pointing out about aircraft wings—it is true for cars, too—that supply chain has sources all over Europe and will usually see multiple cross-border movements before it is completed.

The suggestion that cheaper components could be sourced from anywhere else in the world betrays a fundamental lack of knowledge of the integrated nature of manufacturing in the 21st-century world. The response to someone making those assertions can only be, “Get real!” Moreover, the significance of this burden is shown to someone making those assertions can only be, “Get real!” Moreover, the significance of this burden is shown to someone making those assertions can only be, “Get real!” Moreover, the significance of this burden is shown to someone making those assertions can only be, “Get real!”

The port of Dover estimates that even a two-minute delay in customs processing would lead to a 17-mile queue from Dover. Even short delays would have an impact on the just-in-time production lines that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) mentioned, with costs compounding each time a component

**Antoinette Sandbach** (Eddisbury) (Con): It is clear from the motor manufacturers' association that Honda, for example, has 3.5 million parts per day coming in for its just-in-time manufacturing. One of the complications of these highly integrated supply chains is that we cannot roll over our existing free trade agreements, precisely because of the limits on rules of origin and the ways that those would apply. We cannot manufacture a car now to have the amount of British components that would allow us to roll those free trade agreements over.

**Stephen Hammond:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right about the example that she gives—the car industry. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs has given us clear evidence on this, as well, in terms of the extra bureaucracy. It estimates that 180,000 exporters will now need to make a customs declaration for the first time, having not needed to do so previously. That is in addition to the 141,000 exporters that currently make a declaration for trade outside the EU. That extra bureaucracy is roughly in the small amount of £4 billion a year. Anyone who thinks that is a price worth paying, with the cost being put on industry, should think again.

Some have said that this is a price worth paying to pursue free trade agreements with new markets—markets that will bring us huge new rewards—but the supply chains that will be impacted by these new barriers cannot simply be removed from the EU market and integrated into a new market. They have taken decades to build up and are facilitated by free trade in the EU. By most conventional expectations, it would take further decades for EU exporters to embed themselves in new markets and new supply chains.

The extra requirements would also require physical infrastructure at borders to deal with customs processes. Currently, few checks are required on EU goods at ports, so ports have customs infrastructure in place to deal with non-EU imports only. Given that less than 1% of the lorries arriving through the port of Dover or the channel tunnel require customs checks, there is very little infrastructure, and there is no reason for there to be more.

That is also true on the other side. When representatives from the port of Calais came to speak to the Treasury Committee, they made the point that they have so far made no investment in infrastructure. Whether they will be able to deal with the new customs arrangements by the end of the implementation period without more infrastructure being put in place, or indeed without substantial delays at the port, is not only open to question, but evidence to the Select Committee proved it to be so.

The port of Dover estimates that even a two-minute delay in customs processing would lead to a 17-mile queue from Dover. Even short delays would have an impact on the just-in-time production lines that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) mentioned, with costs compounding each time a component
[Stephen Hammond]
crosses from the EU to the UK or vice versa. As I said earlier, in the car process, that usually happens between three and four times.

Hywel Williams: A great deal of attention has been paid to Dover and Calais and the east-west, north-south routes, but much less has been paid to the Dublin-Holyhead route, although Holyhead is the second-busiest roll-on roll-off port in the United Kingdom. In the Exiting the European Union Committee, when I asked the now former Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), what consideration had been given to Holyhead, he said that none had been given. That was some time ago. I asked the Secretary of State for Wales when he had last visited Holyhead, and he said it was in April 2017. Does the hon. Gentleman share my despair that that route has not received the attention that it requires?

Stephen Hammond: Again the hon. Gentleman guesses what I was about to say next. I was using the ports of Dover and Calais as examples of ports across the United Kingdom. Of course, it would also require restrictions and a border infrastructure to be in place between the two ports he mentions.

Over the last few years, some people have called that project fear, but the reality is that we are facing risks to our economy and to people’s jobs. In the last two weeks, businesses such as Airbus and Jaguar Land Rover have been increasingly vocal about these events and the risks. A recent Institute of Directors poll found that business leaders want a post-Brexit customs arrangement that avoids the new customs processes and maximises EU market access by minimising regulatory divergence. Warnings from big employers and investors in the UK should not be ignored, and certainly not by a Government who are committed to protecting jobs and enhancing employment opportunities.

Heidi Allen (South Cambridgeshire) (Con): On that point, it is important for everyone to recognise that although big businesses can be noisy and have press contacts, the way that business filters through like a food chain means that they provide work for medium-sized businesses, who provide work for small businesses. As a country, we would be completely foolish to risk fundamentally changing the way we deal with our existing EU customers without having a clue about what the new customers in the rest of the world might want. We have to find a way to preserve frictionless trade with our existing customers if we want to protect our economy.

Stephen Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. The supply chain provides jobs in all sorts of areas across the country. It is not just the big employers, but the thousands of people who are employed in their supply chain. For a small firm, the bureaucracy of restrictions such as rules of origin requirements and certificates, will be so extreme that some of them are likely to go out of business. We need to realise that.

We need a solution to those problems that protects jobs and businesses, that reflects the realities at ports, that avoids a border in Ireland and that can be fully enforced by the end of the implementation period. It is no good just relying on the technology being there, because at the moment it does not exist or it has never been tested on anything like that scale.

I am not sure that I am in universal agreement with all hon. Members, but I welcome the Chequers plan as a sensible proposal. As with everything, it will be in the detail, and as I said earlier, we are in a slight vacuum at the moment because the White Paper’s timely publication will be important, but it is not yet with us. One ambiguous area is the suggestion that maintaining frictionless trade with the EU will limit our ability to pursue new free trade deals. I will leave it to the Minister to explain exactly how those proposals will ensure that we can keep the option of free trade open.

The Government’s proposal is a welcome step towards at least recognising the economic reality that will hit us. I do not want to say that the debate has secured all the answers yet, because we will have the White Paper, but I will say that the Brexit debate has not yet faced up to some of the inevitable trade-offs between different rules around the world. If barriers are removed somewhere, they will almost certainly be put up somewhere else. That is the consequence.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman talks about inevitable trade-offs across the world. Up to now, we have talked about the UK’s fluidity in terms of trading with the EU and beyond, but does he agree that we must not lose sight of the massive political and trading changes that might take place in remaining EU countries such as Hungary, Poland, Germany and Austria after we have left?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman may well be right. We cannot know what will happen. We can see tensions already and they may result in different outcomes. We have some certainty about various procedures with those nations because they are members of the EU, but we cannot have the same certainty with other countries that present that fated opportunity.

Whether we like it or not, our economy is extraordinarily and almost inextricably interlinked with the EU’s, with manufacturers benefiting from the complex supply chains. If we were to put up barriers between the UK and the EU by leaving the single market, or by having no comprehensive customs arrangement, we would have to be sure that any new trade deal could make up for putting those barriers in place.

Kirsty Blackman (Aberdeen North) (SNP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Stephen Hammond: A panoply of choice! I will give way to the hon. Lady and then the hon. Gentleman.

Kirsty Blackman: To return to the hon. Gentleman’s welcome of the Chequers plan, could he give more detail about that and how he thinks it will actually work? I have concerns that it may not be workable at all.

Stephen Hammond: As I have said several times, we do not know the detail, but we should welcome three things: first, that there is a plan, because we are a long way into the process; secondly, that it attempts to put in place a UK-EU free trade area; and thirdly, that there is
a common rulebook. As I explained earlier, we cannot just solve the customs part; we need to solve the standards issue as well, because if we do not, we will not be able to trade the products that we want to trade even if we have the best customs arrangements.

None of us has yet seen any of the detail. Some of us will cautiously welcome the plan as a starting point for establishing a free trade area, and some of us will be a bit more positive. We have not yet seen the reaction from others, but I hope they realise that it is an opening offer from the Government that needs to be looked at sensibly.

Paul Girvan: This is a two-way traffic issue and there needs to be flexibility from Europe as well. The UK Government have made some movement in relation to what happened at Chequers and in showing willingness to accommodate, but that needs to be reciprocated by Europe. They can allow us to have that access to the open market in Europe.

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is right, but I say to him, and I am sure that he will accept it, that until we actually put a proposition down to negotiate with, there was nothing to negotiate with. Until the Chequers proposal, it might well have been said by a number of our soon-to-be former EU partners that there actually was not a deal to negotiate on. There were the Prime Minister’s principles: no hard border in Ireland, frictionless trade and the ability to do free trade deals. Those are principles and there is nothing wrong with those principles, but they were not an executable plan. Until they were an executable plan, there was nothing to negotiate on.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield) (Con): Is it not also the case that if we are going to approach this negotiation, we have to look at it—as in any good negotiation—from the other side’s point of view? For the other side, the issue is that they are part of an international treaty that is underpinned by a rulebook. If we are going to ask them to adjust their rulebook to accommodate us, we will have to show that we can do that in a way that is likely to promote certainty for the future, and furthermore does not undermine their own cohesion.

Stephen Hammond: My right hon. and learned Friend is correct. I think that he has made the point several times in this place and in others that there has been a misunderstanding and a failure to comprehend exactly what the EU Commission is. It is a legal body that takes its instructions from others, and therefore its ability to deviate too much in those negotiations until its instructions are changed means that we have failed to understand how we should have been negotiating initially. Now that the plan is there, I am hopeful that we will see more progress.

Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): I am very grateful to my fellow south Londoner for giving way. I know this is a debate about customs, but my biggest issue with the Prime Minister’s proposals is that they do not cover most of the economy, which is services. On customs, however, I have a couple of questions.

First, does he know of any example of where the EU has allowed a third county to collect customs duties on its behalf? The hon. Gentleman has talked about the importance of the rules. Secondly, although I appreciate his comments welcoming the proposals, they are also based on “to be invented” technology to resolve the Irish border issue. Unless that technology is invented and can work, I do not see how it will be able to resolve that conundrum.

Stephen Hammond: I will deal with my fellow south Londoner’s latter point first. I agree with him on technology. There needs to be a system in place. We may move to a technological solution, but, as I said a few moments ago, it is clearly not there at the moment, or it has not been tested on this sort of scale yet.

Secondly, I do not know of any such example, and that will obviously be challenging to the rulebook, but that does not mean that we should not put the proposition forward and therefore I respect what the Government are trying to do in that regard.

As for services, which the hon. Gentleman was clearly talking about and is 80% of the UK’s exports and economy, my hope is—I am not sure whether the Minister will be able to say so today, but it is my hope—that the White Paper may give some hints about how the Government will put in place their enhanced equivalence regime, and the proposals for that, which the Chancellor mentioned in a speech at a different Mansion House event just recently. So I hope that we will hear some news on that in the near future.

Let me go back to the idea of free trade arrangements and free trade agreements. The Treasury Committee had the privilege of going to Washington in April and we met a number of American free trade or trade arrangement negotiators. Everybody I spoke to was excited about doing a deal with the United Kingdom, which is good news. Why were they so excited? Because they told us, frankly and openly, that they can dictate the terms they want, they will get whatever they want and any agreement will give their producers unfettered access to our markets.

We have to be careful, because no one is asking the right question. Of course people want to do deals with us; why would they not want to? The question is this: on what terms of trade will those deals be done? If someone can tell me the answer to that question, I will happily sit down and conclude my remarks now.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way? [Laughter.]

Stephen Hammond: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman’s expert intervention.

Mr Gregory Campbell: Presumably on terms that are mutually advantageous to both sides.

Stephen Hammond: Were that so, I would sit down now, but there is no indication from any of the negotiators to whom I have spoken that that is the case. I will not go into the lurid details of how exactly they have described the prospective arrangement, because this debate has far too genteel an audience. However, I say to the hon. Gentleman that there will clearly be areas of mutual advantage, but it is very clear that those terms of trade in the short term—they may change in the future—are likely to be less advantageous.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?
Stephen Hammond: In one moment. I just want to make this point, because it is pertinent to what the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) was saying. Free trade with the Commonwealth is a goal—an announced goal—for a number of the Brexiteers, but the key question again is this: on what terms will those deals be done?

The economic modelling done for the Whitehall papers shows that a free trade agreement with America would provide a UK GDP benefit of about 0.2%. That is because the average weighted tariff with America is only 2%. So if we get rid of all the tariffs with America, it would add 0.2% to our economy. If we reach agreements with China, India, Australia and New Zealand, of course they would add benefit to the economy—somewhere between 0.1% and 0.4%. I just ask Members to bear that in mind, given the scale and the benefit of the trade that we do with the European Union.

David Simpson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he not agree that, in relation to trying to get a deal and to how we conduct the negotiations, the perception out there among the general public is that Europe keeps changing the goalposts and therefore we cannot get to a definitive position?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is clearly a learned man and I take his view that the great Shakespearean themes are perception and reality, and reality becomes perception and the other way round. But that is not true of course, and it is for those of us who are in this place to stand up and base our decisions on evidence, and to speak the truth. So it is absolutely clear to me that, as we need to protect jobs and businesses, and if we are ready to protect them as they are now, we do not need to sacrifice them for potential gains, if those gains look small and potentially unrealisable.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman is being very generous in giving way. On the point that he has just made, Michel Barnier gave evidence to the Brexit Committee last year and he said that there is a cultural difference here. He said, “Your side seems to think that this last year and he said that there is a cultural difference made , Michel Barnier gave evidence to the Brexit Committee here. He said, “Your side seems to think that this last year and he said that there is a cultural difference

Stephen Hammond: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that point; I hear him and I will look carefully at the Select Committee’s report on that point.

In concluding, I will make a few remarks to the Minister. I hope that he will be able to outline how the Government’s proposals will overcome the costly non-tariff barriers that I spent some time outlining and took a number of interventions about earlier. I also hope that he can reassure us about the steps the Government will take to ensure that the new customs arrangements will be fully ready and tested by the end of the implementation period. I would obviously like to be assured that the Government, and in particular the Department for Transport, have a plan to ensure that our ports and ports on the EU side will be ready for any changes.

Governments should always put the creation and protection of jobs and livelihoods first. While we are leaving the EU, we should not sacrifice people’s livelihoods. That is not what people voted for; whatever they voted for, they certainly did not vote for that. Therefore, it is important to listen to the voice of business.

As I have said, I drafted this speech on Friday and it has gone through one or two reiterations since, on the basis of what has happened, and it will probably go through another one when I see things on Thursday. Nevertheless, I welcome Friday’s agreement. Clearly, we should welcome the fact that it aims to remove the need for tariffs, customs checks and controls. It will be called a facilitated customs arrangement. I understand that the White Paper was going to be published on Thursday; perhaps the Minister might care to give us some detail on how a facilitated customs arrangement is intended to work.

I have taken a number of interventions because this is an extraordinarily important subject. It goes to the essence of what we need to put in place before we leave the European Union and why. Many of us would say that these issues should have been sorted a long time ago, but we are making a good start now. I hope that this debate will contribute to people’s understanding of some of the issues that this country’s businesses will face as we leave the European Union.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): We have 30 minutes until the Front-Bench speeches begin and three people are seeking to catch my eye. Even I can do the maths: there are no more than 10 minutes each, including interventions.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. I congratulate the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) on securing the debate. We serve together on the Treasury Committee and he has presented a typically thorough and well-grounded case for our having frictionless trade and preferably for being in a customs union. I will make a few remarks based on the experience of businesses in my constituency and then ask the Minister a couple of questions.

My constituency in County Durham has a lot of manufacturing and some agriculture, and people in both those areas are interested in the customs arrangements. We do not have significant service sector exporting. I have people who work in the Nissan factory in Sunderland and in small engineering firms that supply the factory. I have a GlaxoSmithKline pharmaceutical plant, which employs 1,000 people, and PPG, a supplier of coolants and sealants to Airbus, which employs 200 people. What north-east manufacturers are concerned about is frictionless trade and regulatory alignment. Those are their top two priorities.

The north-east chamber of commerce has done a great deal of work with the Department for Exiting the European Union and I am sorry to say that it is controversial. As I understand it, the Department has taken the view that one of the purposes of the customs union is to provide a frictionless trade and regulatory alignment. There are their top two priorities.

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the knowledge the chamber gave them. A fortnight ago, the chamber’s chief executive, James Ramsbottom, said that political chaos was reducing business confidence.

We all hope that the Chequers agreement is a step forward—I think it is—but we would like to see a few more steps taken in the north-east. The Government’s assessment has shown that the region would be the part of the country worst hit by a hard Brexit, with a 16% fall in output and unemployment shooting up to a quarter of a million. That would be more people unemployed in our region as a result of a no-deal Brexit than we had in the depths of the recession in the 1980s, when the steel industry and coal mining were being closed left, right and centre.

The hon. Member for Wimbledon pointed out very well the reality. This is what my constituents say to me about the significance of the gravity model: it is expensive to move components around the world. People cannot start importing from Thailand at the same cost as they import from the Netherlands. I urge the Minister to go back to his colleagues with the message that we have to get away from this unicorn Brexit.

As well as wanting frictionless trade, people want no disruption to current systems. I will use examples from each of the firms I mentioned in asking the Minister to explain how a system using one bureaucratic set of rules for imported goods and another exported goods will work. I simply do not understand how that distinction will be made.

Nissan gets components in as part of its integrated supply chain and makes cars. It sells some cars in the UK, some into the European Union and some into third countries in eastern Europe beyond the EU. When it gets the components, how will it know which will go into which cars to be sold in which places? I just cannot grasp that.

We have the same situation with GlaxoSmithKline pharmaceuticals. The company makes drugs with inputs from Ireland—it is a big multinational with plants all over the world—and sells them across the channel in France. How will it know which packets are being used in England and which in France? Or is it the Government’s idea to just sort of pro rata the sales? How would that work if, for example, there was a flu epidemic in France and not in England? Prediction would not be possible—the figures would have to be worked out post hoc and then people would have to claim money back. I simply do not understand how that would work.

Let me give the third example, of PPG. The company makes a component that goes into an Airbus product but has no control over what Airbus does with its outputs. It does not know whether Airbus is selling into Britain or France or Germany, so how will that work? Ministers are doing their best but they need to do better, and I very much hope that this afternoon the Minister will enlighten us a little more about how precisely this will work.

3.7 pm

Antoinette Sandbach (Eddisbury) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Streeter. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) for securing the debate. We applied for the ballot on the same day and he has twice been luckier than I have. He clearly carries the luck with him.

I will focus my remarks on three areas: what the public voted for, the agreement made at Chequers last week, and rules of origin. It is vital that we respect the referendum result. However, I argue that far too much has been read into it. The public gave us a direction of travel, not a road map.

It will be instructive for my constituents if I cite statements made by Vote Leave and its leadership. Not only did they not describe the end state during the campaign, but they refused to do so as a matter of strategy. The brains behind Vote Leave, Dominic Cummings, asked of the campaign: does it “need an exit plan, or does that simply provide an undefendable target and open an unwinnable debate”? The Vote Leave application for designated campaign status went even further, stating that the sole purpose of the organisation was to campaign to leave the European Union in the referendum. In other words, no plan for how to approach our customs arrangements was put to the public, only the high-level objective of leaving the EU. The application continued to state that the full range of options for leave deserved to be heard and that they were “legitimate” and “equally valid”. That hardly sounds like a campaign with a solid plan to put before the electorate. None of those statements suggested for a moment that leaving the customs union and the single market would be the clear consequence of voting to leave.

Some of my constituents in Eddisbury voted to leave the EU, the customs union and the single market, but for every email I get pointing that out, there are others that say their vote to leave was not a vote for a hard Brexit. My suspicion is that there is a majority in Parliament and the country for a soft Brexit, but no majority anywhere for the kind of Brexit supported by the European Research Group members of my party. The Government’s analysis is an effective admission that some leave campaigners have overstated the economic benefits of free trade to justify taking us out of the customs union. That is why I am pleased that the Government have come to an agreement about their negotiating position. It is a welcome dose of reality and a concrete plan, which has eluded DExEU to date.

I support the outline of the plan and look forward to the publication of the White Paper, which I hope will come this Thursday as promised, because Parliament needs time to examine the document in advance of the Taxation (Cross-Border Trade) Bill and the Trade Bill next week. The outline, however, contains much that I can support. A common rulebook for goods and agriculture and a combined customs territory with the EU will go a long way to resolving both the concerns about the Irish border and more generally about ensuring free and frictionless trade. The major industry sectors in the north-west are car manufacturing, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, and energy, particularly nuclear energy.

I have spent five hours a week pretty much every week since we have been sitting in this place listening to evidence to the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee. Business after business has come and said that they do not want to apply under different rules. They say that very often the rules have been British rules that we have taken to Europe—rules on consumer protection, on airline safety, and on how to safely test pharmaceutical products. We have been setting the standards and exporting them not only to Europe,
but globally. It is clear that the move forward at Chequers has much to support it in terms of the common rulebook. Frictionless trade is not only about customs and tariffs, but about non-tariff barriers, and it seems sensible and pragmatic to say that there are many areas—vast areas—where we do not need to diverge. We have set the standards. Very often we have higher global standards than other nations. We have much to be proud of as a nation in how we have led the way in Europe.

As for getting the detail right, I did not stand to get elected as a Conservative to increase costs on my businesses or to tie them up in further bureaucracy. Far from it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon has described, 180,000 firms would need to have additional paperwork and fill out additional customs requirements. If we can reduce that, and if we can get and preserve frictionless trade in our negotiations with Europe, it has much to benefit both the European side and ours.

I am very familiar with the port of Holyhead. We have only one World Trade Organisation-compliant port in this country—Southampton—so all the other ports would need major infrastructure. At the moment, the technology for filling out manifests means that it takes a minimum of four hours from loading goods on to a ferry for them to be processed before they can come off at the other end. Crossings such as Dover do not last four hours, and we can immediately see the problems caused.

I, too, have concerns about services and the fact that many goods are sold with services. An iPad, as my researcher would say, is an expensive paperweight if it does not have the software that comes on it. We need to look at how we can include services, because they are so important for our economy. The loss of access to European markets would be devastating for the many people in Eddisbury who work in the service sector.

Although regulatory alignment on goods is important, it is not enough on its own and this is where we have to look at the impact on our trade of rules of origin. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon was not aware of my speech and I was not aware of his, but we have both picked on the same point about the threat that rules of origin potentially pose for us. Outside a customs union, the UK’s exports to the EU would no longer be exempt from the EU rules of origin. A detailed analysis of supply chains and the cost of obtaining a proof of origin certificate would be required. A complex motor, for example, has many different parts, and every nut, bolt and screw has to have a rule of origin certificate. It is not a simple and easy process to undertake.

It would be a substantial burden to exporters and would act as a significant non-tariff barrier even in a free trade area. The Centre for Economic Policy Research even suggested that the cost of proving the origin of a product could be between 4% and 8% of the value of the goods. That would have a knock-on impact on our ability to roll over trade deals that we currently benefit from as a part of the EU, because the trade agreements treat the EU as a whole when considering whether rules of origin apply to goods that are “sufficiently processed in the EU” so as to qualify for the preferential tariff rates.

Japan identified “cumulative rules of origin” as an issue in its letter to the UK and the EU. That is why I have raised questions about the Government’s plans to retain membership of the regional convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin. I hope the Minister has something to say about that. I look forward to further detail in the White Paper, but I welcome the steps forward made at Chequers.

3.17 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): It is always a pleasure to speak in debates, Mr Streeter, no matter what the issue may be, but, as a Brexiteer, I will give an opinion that might not go down well with others in this Hall. However, it is my opinion and that of many in my party. We are where we are and we have to try to find a way forward. I am very much one of those guys who tries to find a way forward. Coming from Northern Ireland and from a political background, and understanding the political process of where we have got to, I feel that if there is a will to find a way forward, we can find it. I want to express my thoughts in a constructive fashion, and hopefully other Members will appreciate what I try to say.

First, I thank the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) for securing this debate and allowing me the opportunity to speak in it. He succinctly and purposefully put forward his viewpoint, as other Members have done. With the increased uncertainty regarding the bill for our leaving Europe, it is more important than ever that we remember what people voted for when they voted to leave in June 2016. I am clear about what I and the constituency of Strangford voted for: we voted to leave by 56% to 44%. I am very clear about that.

I asked the Prime Minister a question yesterday on fishing, which is important for my constituency, and she answered it. I hope Members get a chance to read it. One could not be anything but clear about what the Prime Minister said in relation to fishing. I am reassured by her response to my question. The Minister’s Parliamentary Private Secretary, the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Scott Mann), is interested in fishing issues and I know he will have taken note of that. That is something on which he and I would be on the same wavelength; we are probably both encouraged by it.

People did not vote to straddle the EU and the UK, for outside influence in law making to be countenanced, or to retain residual membership of Europe. They voted to leave. I voted to leave, and my constituents voted to leave. That is the principle on which everything we do must be based. I understand that the complexities are incredible. I look on everyone in the Chamber as friends and colleagues, and sometimes we differ in our opinions and the way we look at things, but the right hon. and hon. Members present want, as I do, to find a way to an agreement and understanding with Europe.

**Heidi Allen:** The hon. Gentleman is right that a 52% to 48% result has to look like a compromise that the whole country and Parliament can somehow find a way to get behind, so does he agree that the Prime Minister’s outline proposals from Chequers go some way towards that? They would satisfy him as to what is needed for the fishing industry; but I will never forget the unemployment figures given by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). Surely the hon. Gentleman must agree that the right proposals will safeguard all the industries in question, and that they must include close alignment to something like the customs union.
Jim Shannon: I have some concerns about the customs union; but the hon. Lady will know that. We need to focus on how to get a workable relationship with the EU, where it understands that it needs us and—I have to say—that we need it. There is a need for us both to find a suitable—perhaps complex—way forward, ensuring that trade can continue. Like the hon. Lady I am concerned about how business will be affected. We cannot ignore the comments made by big business this last while; but many other businesses are quite confident about the future. I would rather there was a clear agreement and understanding. I take my opinion from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; I am conscious of that perspective, and where we are.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am grateful to my hon. Friend—he is truly a friend. He speaks about the importance of listening to business. Last week the Financial Times carried a report suggesting there were fears about food rotting in ports as a result of the Government pursuing a no-deal Brexit. The hon. Member for Strangford and the small group of 10 MPs that he is in have considerable power with the UK Government. Will he use that to impress on the Government the view that we cannot have a no-deal Brexit, as it would be so bad for ports, including those of Northern Ireland?

Jim Shannon: I do not believe there will be food rotting at the ports. I am more of an optimist about the future. Forgive me for saying it, but I always see the glass as half full rather than half empty. I look positively for the way to achieve our goals. I read the same press report as the hon. Gentleman, but we need to focus on where we are.

The Prime Minister has set out her stall clearly. I am a confirmed Brexiteer—it is not a secret, and hon. Members will know it. I feel that we would be better out of the EU, and I want to be out of it. The Prime Minister made it clear where we are going; but I feel we need an agreement with the EU, to move forward. I hope that the Prime Minister can achieve that and I support her in trying to do it; but I am a single voice in the Democratic Unionist party. There are 10 of us, with a collective voice, and the 10 of us together will support the policy we agree on. I suppose that at this moment we may not be altogether sure what the Prime Minister’s policy is; but I hang on to the assurance that she gave me yesterday about fishing. I want to hang on to her other assurances as well.

I understand that the divorce settlement is onerous and acrimonious, but there is a way forward and we must find it. How are we, in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland, to achieve it? Last year I spoke at Irishfest in Wisconsin. It was a very good event. The Culture Minister of the Republic of Ireland spoke about Brexit from the Republic’s perspective, and I spoke about it from the Northern Ireland perspective. When the debate was over there was not that much difference between what we were trying to achieve. It meant we both had a mind to find a way forward. I want the border as it is. Administratively there must be a way we can get that.

We must also be ever conscious and mindful of the security and safety of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As is true anywhere, the Government have a responsibility for the safety of every citizen. How are they to go about that? It will be done in the same way as the Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland—and before that the Royal Ulster Constabulary—M15, MI6, and all the other bodies involved have done that work over the years. That is quite easy. Vehicle number registration is something that perhaps we have not done much with. The agri-food sector is very important for my constituency and it can be considered as an example, administratively; milk products cross the border three times and that happens easily because we are in the EU. However, we will be out of the EU on 31 March, so we must look towards that time.

Hywel Williams: The Exiting the European Union Committee visited south Armagh at the end of last year and of course the border we saw then is the one that the hon. Gentleman wants. Everyone we spoke to in the north and the south wants—it—that is, virtually no border. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is also desirable to have a similar border between Dublin and Holyhead?

Jim Shannon: I am sure that the Government will respond in relation to the arrangements that are already in place. I do not have the knowledge of Holyhead and what is going on there to comment; but I am fully aware of what happens in south Armagh and in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and I think I speak with some authority about that.

I want to be careful about the time, Mr Streeter; am I allowed some leniency as to extra time?

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): There is a minute to go.

Jim Shannon: My goodness! Then I will go on to mention that the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister’s Questions that we are working towards a “Brexit that ensures that we are out of the customs union, we are out of the single market, we are out of the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, we are out of the common agricultural policy, we are out of the common fisheries policy, we bring an end to free movement, we take control of our borders, and we have an independent trade policy, but we are also able to have a good trade arrangement with the European Union, protecting jobs and prosperity for the future.”—[Official Report, 4 July 2018; Vol. 644, c. 315.]

That is what I wanted to hear, and I will support her to achieve that.

My party’s leader, Arlene Foster, has said: “People voted to take back control of their laws, borders and money, not to make Northern Ireland’s constitutional framework resemble the backside of a tartan tapestry. To create some kind of hybrid status for Northern Ireland where we would be subject to laws and regulations set by others over which we would have no say, whilst setting us apart from our biggest market in the rest of the UK, is sheer madness. It would be the road to economic ruin and the beginning of the constitutional break-up of the United Kingdom.”

People cite the Belfast agreement as a reason to retain a special status in the Union. They say that the terminology that asks for the encouragement of cross-border trade means that we must continue the status quo. That is not the case. The only say that the Belfast agreement has in the matter is the fact that any calls for unification with Ireland must be done through a border call. That has not been done. A back-door unification through a segregated UK is not acceptable. Let us make it clear what we are saying. I look to the Minister in this matter.
This customs arrangement must ensure that the integrity of the UK is retained, and that is not simply for the benefit of Northern Ireland—it is for all of us, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As I often say to my Scottish National party friends, we United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. 

We will need significant infrastructure investment to help them plan, because we do not know what will happen. Even the plan from the UK Government—the Chequers agreement, as I am sure it will be known—provides no certainty because we do not yet have an agreement with the EU, which is fundamental. This is a statistical of £4 billion a year in extra bureaucracy, which is a real issue.

The Chequers plan should have been published before article 50 was triggered, and we should have had this level of certainty about the UK Government's future plans at that stage. Businesses are worried about what will happen—in a recent poll, mainly small businesses said that they are using only in-house expertise to plan for what will happen post-Brexit. They are not bringing in any specialist knowledge, which is a problem. At this point, however, they cannot bring in specialist knowledge to help them plan, because we do not know what will happen. Even the plan from the UK Government—the Chequers agreement, as I am sure it will be known—provides no certainty because we do not yet have an agreement with the EU, which is fundamental. This is a negotiation, and we need certainty for businesses so that they can work out what customs arrangements will look like.

The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) spoke at length about the issues we are debating are important to businesses in our constituencies. I will save most of the particularly lengthy speech that I could make for the debate on the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill next week. I am sure that the two Front Benchers have heard most of it already anyway. As repetition is encouraged in this place they will be delighted to hear it again next week.

You will not be surprised to hear, Mr Streeter, that the SNP’s position is that we should stay in the EU. Scotland voted to stay in the EU, and I believe that is in the best interests of people in Scotland. That is not just because people voted to remain, but because I passionately believe that being a member of the EU has helped us culturally, and also had a huge economic benefit. If we cannot stay in the EU, I think we should stay in the single market and customs union. A number of issues about staying in the customs union have been rehashed and discussed in this debate and I will mention a few of them, but first I wish to comment briefly on the Chequers plan.

Non-tariff barriers and rules of origin are important. The hon. Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) raised a point about rules of origin that I have mentioned previously, and in particular the rolling over of the EU’s current free trade agreements with third countries. It is incredibly important to ensure that those free trade agreements include cumulation, so that when cars are sold that do not meet the 65% content rule—for example, if they are being exported to South Korea—cumulation of EU content with UK content can be included to allow that free trade agreement to continue. If those free trade agreements are not rolled over with an element of cumulation, on the day that the UK leaves the EU we will no longer be able to export cars to South Korea. That will be an issue for other countries as well, but the car industry has that 65% figure, which is important.

Although the UK has a system of authorised economic operators, its system does not have the same flexibility to allow someone to become an AEO that exists in some other countries. The UK Government have said that being an authorised economic operator will help with exporting, which it will. However, that AEO system needs to be more flexible and ensure that people can more easily fulfil the requirements to become an AEO. If there are any additional customs barriers to those that currently exist, many more people will need to apply to become an AEO and have less friction in their trade.

There is not yet clarity on how rules of origin will look, or on filling in the form, and I am slightly concerned that that was omitted from the Customs Bill. At the moment, the British Chambers of Commerce has things such as certified rules of origin, but the Bill does not state what our rules of origin form will look like, or whether the UK Government will create a form that business can fill in to replicate the EUR 1 form. Obviously, we cannot continue to use the EUR 1 form because we will be outside the EU, but the Government need to copy and paste it in, and it would be good if they could give certainty to businesses about what that form is likely to look like, so that they know with what they will be expected to comply.

We are told that the benefit of leaving the customs union is that we will be able to strike free trade agreements, but earlier the point was made pretty comprehensively about how low those free trade agreements will be. Earlier this year The Sun published an article called “Vote for bargains”, which it later corrected. It was put out by members of the European Research Group, and it stated that there would be a £1 reduction in the price of butter as a result of us leaving the EU and being able to reduce our tariffs. In reality, only 0.23% of the butter that we import comes from outside the EU, and that comes from New Zealand. It does involve a tariff, but it is only 0.23% of the butter that we import. Crashing out
without a trade deal and having tariffs on EU butter would be a real problem for the UK. My best guess is that rather than £1, we are looking at a saving of a couple of pence, but that would be only for companies that export butter from New Zealand because it is not sold in any retail way that I could find.

The article also stated that there would be a £44 saving on a TV from South Korea. Given that the EU has a trade deal with South Korea that includes zero tariffs on such goods, it is important for us to challenge such assertions when they are made. Misinformation is being spread about the cost of tariffs, but in reality that cost is minimal compared with the huge cost of non-tariff barriers. As the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) said, if the gravity model comes into play, we do far more trade with the EU than with anybody else. If a country has a free trade agreement with another country, it will have some regulatory alignment with that other country; it will not be free to make all its own rules because it will have to sign up to some of that country’s regulations—we have already discussed chlorinated chicken, for example. It is not the case that the UK will be a sovereign nation that is able to make all its own rules; that is not how free trade agreements work—they involve give and take.

I think the customs union is vital. The Chequers agreement does not solve many of the issues that we have been discussing, or give certainty to businesses. It is also likely to be unacceptable to the EU and it does not solve the problem of Northern Ireland because of issues with technology. Next week, during discussion on the Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill, we will have the opportunity to vote on an amendment tabled by the right hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry), which states that the UK’s negotiating position should be that we stay in the customs union. It is vital that Members support that amendment, and I think we have a majority in the House of Commons for that. If that is not the will of the people, I do not know what is.

3.38 pm

Jonathan Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Streeter, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond) on securing this debate. I do not wish to do him any harm, but I can say honestly that I am always prepared to listen to him, and I found his speech lucid, informed and persuasive.

You will understand what I mean, Mr Streeter, when I say that when I was sitting in the Library yesterday, this was not an easy debate to prepare for. Major issues within the Cabinet were being resolved in public, and it was not clear whether today would begin with the Prime Minister being in a position to say that she can go forward and deliver the Brexit deal that protects jobs and the economy that we all want. I do not say that with any pleasure or partisanship, because as I listened to the hon. Gentleman, I could not help thinking that at this stage we should not even be having this debate. We should know the answers to many of the questions he raised, or at least we should know the UK’s preferred answer to those questions.

We cannot deny that, since the referendum result, there has been a lot of delay and dithering, and the lack of clarity that that has caused has put jobs and living standards at risk. That delay and lack of clarity is operating within an economy that still faces many significant challenges, such as the collapse in growth, huge problems with productivity, and the fact that many of our constituents live very difficult lives. Those on both Front Benches agree about those challenges, even if we propose different solutions.

It seems reasonable to say that the Government by now should have come up with a credible and comprehensive customs plan for post-Brexit. Recent events at Chequers indicate that the Government are moving away from the type of Brexit advocated by many Tory Brexiteers and towards what we might call a soft Brexit—I would simply call it an economically realistic Brexit—but the Government’s proposals at Chequers stop short of the comprehensive customs solution we feel is needed. Meanwhile workers, businesses and everyone who voted in the referendum, no matter how they chose to vote, are reasonably seeking reassurance and security over what Brexit is likely to mean for their future and that of the country.

As the Opposition, our message has been clear and consistent: we respect the result of the referendum, but we still want to work with European partners in the economic interests of the country. Our priority is simply to get the best deal for jobs, living standards and the economy, and we are pragmatic about how that should be done. We will reject any race to the bottom in workers’ rights, environmental safeguards, consumer protections or food safety standards. We want people in this country to continue to enjoy the same protections as our cousins on the continent. That is why Labour proposes to negotiate a new comprehensive UK-EU customs union to ensure frictionless trade between the UK and EU. In particular, we want to ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe and the continuation of advanced supply chains, particularly in manufacturing, which was well described in speeches today. Crucially, we want to help avoid a hard border in Northern Ireland.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): A number of northern businesses have come to me. They are all globally owned, global manufacturing and exporting businesses that use the port of Dover. They have said they are now looking at contingency with other ports because of the proposed customs arrangements. They are concerned that every port will have the arrangements and their businesses will have to move outside the UK. Are the proposals that my hon. Friend is outlining not exactly the sort of proposals that will alleviate the fears of those businesses?

Jonathan Reynolds: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I say to all Ministers that, for many of us, this matter is not an abstract question. I am a little younger than my hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), but I grew up in the north-east in the 1980s, not far from her constituency. It was clearly a time of substantial turmoil. We had the miners’ strike and the shipyards closing. The modern prosperity of those areas has been built around a relationship with the single market, the European Union and inward investment. Many of my schoolfriends work in that Nissan plant, which is the most efficient car factory in the world. There is a plant in Mexico that disputes that, but we are pretty sure we have got it. The Government should not underestimate just how willing many of us are to fight to ensure that the next generation do not
have to undergo the kind of economic turmoil that many of grew up within. They should recognise the benefits that have been brought from that relationship.

The Taxation (Cross-border Trade) Bill—many of us here are veterans of its Committee—ostensibly sets out from the Government’s point of view how we will create a functioning customs framework for the United Kingdom once we leave the European Union. Many of us have read all of that Bill, and there is nothing in it that guarantees frictionless trade through UK ports from the moment of exit. There are no measures that properly resource Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs for the task ahead. There is nowhere near sufficient detail on the powers and provisions of the Trade Remedies Authority, which will be charged with securing vital British interests.

Frankly, it is just an enabling Bill. The political decisions that will be required to decide whether we use the powers within that Bill have not yet been taken. They may have been taken at Chequers, but we will need to see more detail on that and the political fallout. It is still fair to say that the Government have failed to offer specifics on what the new customs system will look like, how it will work and, crucially, whether it will be ready on time. Huge underlying questions remain about whether the current customs declaration service programme can deal with the sheer workload and pressure coming its way post-Brexit.

Everyone in the House agrees that we must avoid the nightmare scenario of gridlock at UK ports with lorry queues stretching as far as the eye can see, yet the Government continue to refuse to acknowledge that HMRC has had its staffing levels cut substantially—they have been cut by nearly a fifth since 2010. There are still plans to close 137 HMRC offices across the country. HMRC has 2,000 less staff today than it did on the day of the referendum. That has to bring into question our ability to deal with a future customs regime.

In contrast, we recognise the urgent need to hire and train more customs officers and HMRC staff, particularly if the Government are to meet their ambitious target of a fully operational customs system by 2019. In addition, the Public and Commercial Services Union only last week warned that strike action looks increasingly likely after the Treasury announced without consultation that the pay cap would be lifted only through cuts and increased workloads across Departments. That is not an ideal position to be in, based on where we are today.

Post-Brexit, we will need the ability to enforce against the dumping of unfairly priced goods. At the moment, those remedies are provided in conjunction with the EU, but on leaving the UK will have to enact and manage its own trade remedies. The measures are spread across a number of pieces of legislation and are of great interest and importance to UK manufacturers. The manufacturing industry remains an indispensable part of the UK economy. Some of the speakers today, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond), I believe we might be facing each other next week on another occasion. There seems to be a sense that something is happening on Monday or Tuesday next week. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Jonathan Reynolds) on securing the debate.

As many have suggested, it might be worth me injecting as much clarity as I can on the Government’s position. While Members made extremely valid and well-put points about the downsides of an arrangement in which we perhaps have no deal and there is a hard border between us and the EU27, I am not so sure that the merits of the proposition that the Cabinet agreed at Chequers have come through.

We want the Government to set out a clear path to our mutual objective of creating a functioning institutional framework for the handling of customs once we leave the European Union. Crucially, we must recognise that the final customs regime post-Brexit will be a result of the deal we strike with the EU, not the deal we strike among ourselves in Parliament or between different factions of the Conservative party. We must be ready for that regime, but we feel that the overwhelming evidence favours the UK entering into a continued and renewed customs union with the EU. The Government perhaps moved some way towards that last weekend. Perhaps they will go just that little bit further to get us the post-Brexit customs regime that this country needs.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Before I call the Minister to respond, I ask him to leave two minutes for Mr Hammond to have the final word.

3.46 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride): I will certainly leave two minutes for my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon (Stephen Hammond).

As much as I can on the Government’s position. While Members made extremely valid and well-put points about the downsides of an arrangement in which we perhaps have no deal and there is a hard border between us and the EU27, I am not so sure that the merits of the proposition that the Cabinet agreed at Chequers have come through.

As we all know, the main problem with a hard border or even with the maximum facilitation arrangements is that we would have a border between ourselves and the EU27. We would have various degrees of friction that we would seek to reduce under the max fac model through various facilitations and the use of technology, but we know there would be costs associated with that kind of arrangement. That is why at the Chequers meeting we wisely moved towards something that works much better in that respect. In terms of the cost of the kinds of frictions we might have with some of the scenarios that have been conjured up this afternoon, the head of HMRC tallied the cost of the additional customs declarations that would have to be entered into as a consequence of a border between ourselves and the EU27 at about £20 billion a year. Those are not insignificant costs to business, which the Government most certainly recognise.

The model we are now looking at is a facilitated customs arrangement, where we will act effectively as the agent for the European Union at our borders when it comes to goods coming through the UK into the EU. We will be collecting the European Union’s tariff at that point. For goods going directly into the United Kingdom for consumption or end use in our jurisdiction, we would apply the UK tariff at that point.
We would also have a common rulebook, which means that for regulation pertaining to goods and agricultural products, we would not, at least initially, have any regulatory misalignment between ourselves and the EU27. The significance of that is that we will therefore not require border and customs arrangements between ourselves and the EU27, and indeed between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

Kirsty Blackman: On goods that are coming in from a third country, how will the Government work out on which bits to charge the UK tariff, and on which bits to charge the EU tariff?

Mel Stride: I point the hon. Lady to her question about the White Paper. There will be more detail to come on just those kinds of questions, and of course much of this will remain to be negotiated. Our estimate is that the vast majority—well in excess of 90%—of goods coming in could be charged directly at the border as an EU good, or would be non-tariff anyway under both EU and UK arrangements, or face the UK tariff accordingly. A very small proportion might fall into the category to which she refers.

Helen Goodman: That was the crux of my questions. Listening to the Minister, I realise I perhaps did not formulate it quite as accurately as I should have. The question is not how much comes for one purpose and how much comes for another purpose. The question is how the person importing knows what the purpose will be, and where the final user will be. That is the tricky question. I can see the Minister frowning, so he knows it is tricky as well.

Mel Stride: When goods come in and the end-use cannot be determined, we foresee a situation where we might have to charge the higher tariff, with a rebate mechanism in place once the end-user can demonstrate that those goods have indeed been consumed, or found their end-use, in the United Kingdom. As I say, some of those matters will be addressed in the White Paper that will be with us this week.

Hon. Members have rightly mentioned supply chains and the importance of goods and components going in and out of the EU27. The points raised by the hon. Lady in the context of Nissan will be accommodated substantially by the model we are putting forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon mentioned VAT systems. We have made it clear that we are looking in the negotiations to ensure that we have the best of the arrangements that are there at the moment, in terms of systems and making our VAT interactions as smooth as possible, albeit we will look to control rates of VAT. In the recent Budget the Chancellor commented on the abolition of acquisition VAT and the move towards import VAT. We recognise that there are certain cash-flow impositions on the part of business that we will want to take into account.

A number of hon. Members rightly mentioned ports, and I think a couple specifically suggested that a two-minute delay could lead to a 17-mile tailback at Dover. We are, of course, extremely cognisant of that risk, but once again, it applies if we need border and customs arrangements in place at the port of Dover, Holyhead and the other ports that have been mentioned. Under this model, that would clearly not be the case.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon also made a point about free trade deals and how the approach of the facilitated customs arrangement would facilitate them. Most importantly, as distinct from being in “the” customs union, or in a customs union with the customs union, we would not operate a common external tariff, so we would be free to set our own tariffs. The fact that we have a common rulebook between ourselves for goods and agricultural products means that the issue of regulatory barriers, which might otherwise be in place for us in doing FTAs and bringing goods into the UK that might then go on to the European Union, would also be substantially resolved.

Stephen Hammond: The Minister is obviously right in what he has just said about tariffs. Does he also accept that the rulebook and some of the standards in it are likely to restrict our ability to have free trade with certain countries if they do not meet those standards?

Mel Stride: My hon. Friend is right inasmuch as that is potentially the case if there are any inconsistencies—we might otherwise have varied our rules accordingly to accommodate an FTA. However, the Government have made it clear that although we will have total alignment at the start, we will not seek an arrangement where we will be unable to deviate from that in the future, albeit we recognise that there will be consequences for doing so.

A number of hon. Members raised the issue of preparedness, and I assure them that we will be in a good position and ready on day one if we have a no-deal situation. The Chancellor allocated £3 billion for Brexit preparations in the last Budget. Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs received £46 million last year and around £250 million in this financial year. We have already recruited, or have in train the recruitment of, around 1,000 new staff going into HMRC with a focus on borders. We have said that we will move that figure up to between 3,000 and 5,000. Some Members mentioned the customs declaration system. The National Audit Office has suggested that we are broadly speaking where we need to be to ensure that that system comes online and live before March next year.

The hon. Member for Streatham (Chuka Umunna) asked why the EU would allow us to collect EU tariffs when there are no such arrangements with any other trading partner. We are in a unique situation. We are a very large trading partner with the European Union. We have complete alignment at the moment in regulations with that market, so we start from a position that is not occupied by others.

I think I have gone through most of the points raised by the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman). I am grateful that she said that initially she broadly welcomed the proposals, and we should all do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Antoinette Sandbach) made the very important point that we are seeking an arrangement that can command the broad support of the British people—an arrangement that ensures that the UK and the EU have frictionless access to each other’s markets for goods; that provides regulatory flexibility in the way that I have described; that enables commitments to Northern Ireland to be met and the Good Friday agreement to be honoured; that sees us leave the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy; that allows us to deliver an independent
[Mel Stride]

trading policy; that ensures that, in future, all laws in the UK will be legislated for by our Parliament; that restores the supremacy of UK courts; and that ends the free movement of people and vast payments to the EU. The broad majority of people in our country will welcome that achievement.

I hope that, particularly in the debate on Monday, Parliament as a whole comes together. This is a moment in our history where there are undoubtedly significant opportunities, but also a number of challenges. I hope we see the debate through that prism, rather than through anything that is rather more narrow and party-political. On that note, Mr Streeter, I gladly give the Floor to my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbledon.

Mr Gary Streeter (in the Chair): Thank you very much. Mr Stephen Hammond will have the final word.

3.58 pm

Stephen Hammond: Mr Streeter, you will be pleased to hear that my final words will not be as long as my starting words. Thank you for being in the Chair this afternoon. I think you will agree that, although we did not have as many contributions as we sometimes have in such debates, they were of exceptionally good quality. I thank all hon. Members for contributing.

The Minister said at the beginning that he had hoped that we would set out a little more ambitiously some of the potential opportunities that the Chequers plan will afford. Today, he has heard everybody welcome that plan, but some hon. Members set out some of the considerable risks if we do not achieve the ambitions in it. We are grateful to him for setting out in his 10 minutes some of those ambitions in a little more detail, because they overcome some of the issues if they are enacted. He is right to make that entreaty.

I hope that after we have seen the White Paper this week, we can all join the Minister next week in supporting the customs arrangement. However, there are significant issues about rules of origin and the cost of bureaucracy. I know he knows that, and I hope the Government keep it in mind as they move forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered customs arrangements after the UK leaves the EU.

[Mr Philip Hollobone in the Chair]

4 pm

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered open access rail services.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, as always, Mr Hollobone. It is noticeable that the audience is fleeing just as the highlight of the day is coming on.

I secured this debate for two reasons: first, because I think the present system of rail franchising needs a certain amount of reform; and, secondly, because I am conscious that an open access operator will shortly put in an application to the regulator to deliver direct rail services to my constituency. I hope the application will be for four trains a day each way serving Scunthorpe, Grimsby and Cleethorpes, because that would be a great boost to the local economy.

Just last week, the Government acknowledged the important part that northern Lincolnshire and the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area have to play in the northern powerhouse, when the Northern Powerhouse Minister and Lord Henley from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy visited north-east Lincolnshire to sign the pilot town deal, which promises considerable investment in the area. It also recognises the importance of the Humber estuary and northern Lincolnshire in particular to the national and regional economy.

The reality is that the south bank of the Humber is badly served by rail at the moment. The hourly service to Manchester airport is very welcome. It provides connections to Doncaster and Sheffield, which link to many parts of the country, but businesses and many Members of Parliament would greatly benefit from a direct train service.

I note that the former Rail Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), has joined us. I think I am right that he once described himself as an apostle of open access. Hopefully, he will continue to argue that case in the higher reaches of Government, to which he has succeeded in climbing. I hope the new Minister—I welcome him to the debate—has similar views. In recent appearances before the Transport Committee, the Secretary of State seems to have been more sympathetic and warmer to the concept of open access.

In my part of the country, Hull Trains has given a considerable boost to the economy of the north bank of the Humber. Grand Central, which I think is about to submit an application, will hopefully do the same for the south bank.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): My constituency also benefits from open access services run by Grand Central, which covers Yorkshire and the north-east to London. It is a vital service, but this year it has been struggling and not performing very well. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the recent frequent cancellations, the failure of air conditioning units and the overcrowding are worrying signs that require investigation?

Martin Vickers: I acknowledge what the hon. Gentleman says, and I have to say that I have experienced similar problems on some of my own journeys. Hull Trains, in particular, has recently gone through a rather bad spell,
from which it has now hopefully recovered. That does not take anything away from the concept of open access which, as the hon. Gentleman acknowledges, has provided services to towns off the main east coast and west coast lines. That is essential if we are to develop the north-east and Humberside economies.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Martin Vickers: I give way to yet another former Transport Minister.

Stephen Hammond: Does my hon. Friend agree that the concept of open access could drive efficiency back into the railway system, where it is needed? He mentioned the failure of the franchising system. Network Rail’s inability to link to the requirements of the operator is one fundamental problem with the rail system. A slot auction system for access could give Network Rail an incentive to align itself with the operators’ objectives.

Martin Vickers: I thoroughly agree. My hon. Friend’s experience as a former Minister makes that a particularly relevant point.

We are currently experiencing record private investment in UK rail. In 2016-17, that investment totalled £925 million—the highest since records began. The vast majority—£767 million—was spent on rolling stock. Some of that went to Hull Trains.

Given the other demands on the Budget, the idea that more taxpayer investment would go towards the railways was a myth. I know the Opposition’s policy is to renationalise the railways, but those of us who remember the nationalised system know that, in fact, it spiralled down because of a lack of investment. The reality is that there are so many calls on Government investment that transport does not get what it deserves. If the Government have a choice between investing in the health service and improving the rail services to Cleethorpes, I rather suspect that the rail services to Cleethorpes would suffer.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): On that point, I am a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament, and there are proposals for the co-operations of the railways. An open access operator—Go-Op—is developing a route in the south-west. Diversifying rail ownership is a big priority for the Co-operative party and for me as a Member of Parliament. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we need diversity of ownership in the system?

Martin Vickers: I am perfectly happy to have diversity of ownership—that is what the free market would most likely deliver. Sadly, the history of British Rail did nothing to encourage my enthusiasm for a nationalised system. Indeed, British Rail ended the direct service to Cleethorpes in 1992.

There has been record investment and record numbers of journeys in recent years. Passenger numbers fell under British Rail but, since privatisation in 1994, the numbers swelled to 1.65 billion in 2015—almost triple the low point of 1982. Although there have been clear failings by Virgin Trains, it is vital to look beyond the headlines. Thanks to the Transport Secretary’s efforts, rail efficiency has been improved, ensuring that passengers and taxpayers get maximum value. On average, 97% of every pound of passengers’ fares goes back into the railway, which is very welcome.

Since Virgin took over its franchise in 2015, it has contributed more to the taxpayer than when the service was publicly run. Refurbished trains, additional services and improved ticketed access are just a few of the benefits that passengers have experienced. Of course,Virgin is not blameless in the debacle, but it is not alone. Network Rail, the publicly owned element of the railways, failed to deliver the promised improvements on which Virgin based its final projections.

I have been reassured by the Transport Secretary’s commitment to a new approach from 2020, with the first regional public-private partnership on the route. The partnership will have one brand, one management team and one leader, which will ensure that it is transparent and accountable to both Parliament and passengers.

A privatised franchise system on the east coast is preferable to the publicly owned system that preceded it. It has also been improved dramatically by the advent of open access operators, which provide constant competition to drive up standards and outcomes for passengers. The main problem is that the rail industry has been reformed to an unsatisfactory halfway house between nationalisation and privatisation. The solution, contrary to what many in the Opposition would argue, is not to nationalise the whole system—the experience of British Rail shows where that will take us—but to push ahead with privatisation and extend the market by allowing open access on other lines which could benefit so greatly from it. The hard left so often tell us that true communism has not been tried, but in actual fact true competition has not been tried on our rail network.

Open access could be a logical component of the Prime Minister’s mission, which she set out at the party conference last year, saying of free markets that she was “prepared to reform them when they don’t work.”

The rail service is a prime example of a market underperforming. The solution, rather than to take the market out of the picture altogether and reverse all the progress made over the past few decades, is to reform the market, taking on the monopolies so as to expand it and allow it to flourish.

Competition must extend beyond the bidding stage to avoid the winner being granted a complete monopoly. The message to existing franchise operators and bidders should be clear: expect competition in future.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making strong points about competition and bidding. Is it not also incumbent on the Government to refine their bidding process, ensuring better information for potential rail service providers so that contracts may be structured to work for the long term?

Martin Vickers: That is an important point. It is essential that we move in that direction.

What has been the impact of competition to date? As I said, passenger journeys have increased by 42% on competitive lines, compared with 27% on those that have no competition; revenue has increased by 57%, compared with 48%; and average fares have increased by only 11%, compared with 17%. The east coast main
line has open access operators such as Grand Central Trains and Hull Trains. Other rail lines around the country would do well to replicate that model.

Open access operators take no support from the taxpayer. The open access model creates competition on the line, which has led to fantastic results. In fact, since that has been the case on the east coast, the main line has had the highest satisfaction ratings in the country. The east coast open access operators deliver the very highest rates: in 2015 First Hull Trains and Grand Central each had a 94% passenger satisfaction rate, which was the joint highest score of all operators. That was confirmed in 2016 and 2017 in the passenger satisfaction surveys conducted by the Competition and Markets Authority.

In 2016, the CMA recommended more on-track competition generally, either with much more open access to compete with franchises on the same lines or with multiple operators to provide services in a fully commercial environment. Unlike the CMA, however, the Government are yet formally to declare their support for the principle of extended open access. Perhaps the Minister will take up the offer to do so this afternoon.

Open access competition has led to new routes being opened or reopened. Without open access on the east coast main line, would places such as Sunderland, Hartlepool, Halifax and Bradford have the frequent, direct and high-speed long-distance services from which they now benefit? Something similar desperately needs to be replicated in northern Lincolnshire.

The business community has made its support for open access clear. On services to northern Lincolnshire, the Hull and Humber chamber of commerce stated:

“Hull Trains have done an outstanding job for the city in improving our rail service from a one a day return with the main franchise holder (GNER) some years ago to seven a day now.”

In the north-east, the chambers of commerce have been equally supportive.

Some argue that more open access will reduce the franchise premium. I acknowledge that protection should be offered to the franchise holders given that they pay such a large amount for the privilege of operating services, but I ask the Minister what is more important: the Treasury getting additional resources or the passenger getting better services? Without doubt, we should focus on the passenger.

To conclude, I restate the importance of services into northern Lincolnshire, which have the support of business and of the local community who want the services for leisure travel. As I said, the Government gave northern Lincolnshire the title “energy estuary”. It is an important part of the northern powerhouse, which has focused too much on the north-west and the Leeds-Manchester-Liverpool triangle. An opportunity now exists to provide a boost to the local economy in many of our regions and provincial towns, and coastal communities in particular. I urge the Minister to do all he can to support the requirement for services into northern Lincolnshire. I very much hope that the application to the regulator in the not-too-distant future will be successful.

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure, Mr Hollobone, to serve under your chairmanship, which I am sure has played its part in attracting not one but two illustrious former Rail Ministers to the debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Cleethorpes (Martin Vickers) on securing the debate and on the landmark town deal for Greater Grimsby that was agreed last week. More than 8,800 new jobs and nearly 10,000 new homes will be delivered in Greater Grimsby, including his proud constituency of Cleethorpes, thanks to a deal worth £67 million. The deal encompasses improvements to key roads and the establishment of enterprise zones to attract and support businesses in the area, further increasing investment and employment.

Competition through open access on the rail system has delivered benefits to parts of the network, as my hon. Friend highlighted and as the Competition and Markets Authority noted in its 2016 report on rail competition. For a number of years we have had successful open access operators on the network, such as Hull Trains and Grand Central, delivering important services to the communities that they serve.

In the right circumstances, therefore, the Government have supported open access applications—for example, Hull Trains’ successful application to run innovative services in 2017 in support of Hull’s year as the city of culture. Those services gave many more people the opportunity to enjoy the city’s excellent showcase, and they still operate today.

Ultimately, the independent Office of Rail and Road determines applications to run open access services based on industry consultation and its own analysis, balancing the range of statutory duties, which include benefits for passengers; the financial impact on the Government and, critically, existing passengers; and the performance impacts on the network. Grand Central’s 2016 application to run services to Cleethorpes was not granted by the ORR, but as a Department we want future applications that offer genuine benefits for passengers, serve new markets such as Cleethorpes and deliver innovative services that complement the existing franchising system. We made that position clear in “A Strategic Vision for Rail”, published last November, and in the guidance we issued to the Office of Rail and Road last July.

It is important to pick up on the point made by my hon. Friend about open access operators not receiving any Government subsidy. It is true that we do not directly subsidise open access operators, but they do not pay towards the fixed costs of the network on which they operate, nor do they contribute towards the vital social services that the franchised operators that they compete with deliver. That creates something of an uneven playing field, which distorts the incentives of operators and means that we cannot realise the full benefits of competition for passengers.

The CMA recommended that, with robust reforms in place, open access could deliver benefits for passengers. The Department for Transport and the Government agree with that assessment. That is why we are working closely with the ORR on its proposals for reforming track access charges in the next rail control period CP6 from 2019 to 2024. Under those reforms, open access operators
will pay an appropriate amount towards the fixed costs of the network where they can. We support that as a vital step in creating a level playing field between franchised and open access operators.

We have also consulted on a possible public service obligation levy. The levy would complement track access charging reform so that open access operators would also pay towards the social services that franchised deliver to many stations—those stations would not have the levels of service they do today if the free market was left entirely to itself. The Government offer greater passenger choice through the franchising system to deliver social as well as economic benefits. A greater contribution from open access operators towards the costs of the railways and a more level playing field should lead to more opportunities for open access services, but it is critical that we get the reforms in place first so we can start on the right footing.

It is important to state that franchised operators will still deliver the vast majority of services. We need public accountability to ensure everyone can benefit.

Joseph Johnson: Indeed, in 2016 the Competition and Markets Authority said that there could be a greater role for open access of up to 30% of train paths on some routes. It suggested that it would like two to three open access operators on each inter-city route—east and west coast—and also on the Great Western main line. That recommendation was subject to important reforms to ensure that the open access operators make that appropriate contribution towards the cost of the railway. Those reforms were the ones I mentioned: to track access charging and the introduction of a public service obligation. Both would therefore see open access operators pay a sufficient contribution towards the overall cost of the railway.

It is right that government retains sufficient control over services and fares as well as operator profits through franchising contracts. Those contracts allow government to ensure the provision of socially and economically beneficial services that the market would not otherwise provide and protect passengers by regulating certain fares. It is also right to recognise the role that franchising plays in rebalancing the economy—franchise payments from the most heavily utilised parts of the network fund services in other regions, thereby maintaining the national network and providing a range of economic and social opportunities that would not otherwise materialise.

Open access has an important role to play in delivering new, innovative and commercially viable services for passengers, but it must fulfil that role as part of a railway that serves as a national asset and not just a business. That means operating alongside and complementing a franchising system that allows the railway to shape and support people, businesses and the economy all over the country.

Question put and agreed to.

Defined-benefit Pension Schemes

4.24 pm

Laura Smith (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered protecting defined-benefit pension schemes.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone, and to introduce this important debate. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and the Minister; their presence underlines the importance of this issue.

There are few more precious assets than a pension. Pensions are not benefits; they are deferred wages deducted from the previous earnings of responsible working people who decided to save diligently during their working life, in return for financial security in retirement. As we all know, the funds that are made up of those savings invest huge amounts in our economy, as well as providing for our pensioners in retirement. Dignity in later life is something that every Member present values immensely. We should all feel duty-bound to do everything we possibly can to guarantee that for each and every pensioner in our country, without exception.

Let me begin by stating from the outset that I am no expert on pensions. I have called this debate because it is of the utmost importance to workers in my constituency. I believe that will be the case for all Members here today. It is incumbent on us all to develop our understanding of the key issues to ensure that the livelihoods of pensioners up and down our country are safeguarded, and to ensure dignity in later life for all.

Providing our pensioners with an income that they can live on comfortably is a key pillar of dignity in later life. The fight against pensioner poverty must therefore include a determined effort to provide the highest quality pensions in the most secure and sustainable way. Defined-benefit pension schemes have offered some workers precisely that for many years. The attractiveness of an affordable scheme that enables them to plan their retirement in return for financial security in retirement. As we all know, the funds that are made up of those savings invest huge amounts in our economy, as well as providing for our pensioners in retirement. Dignity in later life is something that every Member present values immensely. We should all feel duty-bound to do everything we possibly can to guarantee that for each and every pensioner in our country, without exception.

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Auto-enrolment has been a success in that it has increased the number of workers saving for retirement, so I applaud the Government’s continued efforts in that respect. However, auto-enrolment cannot be seen by employers as a retreat in which they can hide from their responsibilities under existing DB schemes. DB schemes appear to be working well—the Minister said so in his address to the TUC earlier this year. He also said that where employers can, they should continue their responsibilities. I wholeheartedly agree with him. Research by Mercer published earlier this month suggested that DB pension deficits at FTSE 350 organisations have more than halved since January. In 2015, FTSE 100 companies paid around five times as much in dividends as they did in contributions to their DB pension schemes.

The Green Paper that the Government published last year states that in 2015, companies with a DB pension scheme deficit paid out £33 billion in dividends—25% more than their disclosed deficits. It therefore seems logical to conclude that those companies have the ability immediately to repair their pension scheme deficits by feeding dividends into deficit repair contributions.

I do not pretend that there are no issues with individual DB schemes, but in aggregate such schemes do not appear to be inherently unaffordable. We must remember that they provide decent, good-value pensions. Defined-contribution schemes require much larger contributions to have a realistic chance of providing benefits equivalent to those paid by DB schemes. The value of the pot in a DB scheme is far higher in nearly every case, and both scheme members and their employer will have paid less for it.

There also appears to be an issue with overly risk-averse assumptions threatening DB schemes. Pensions Regulator guidance allows schemes to base the discount rate on the rate of return that assets held by the fund are expected to generate over the lifetime of the scheme, yet trustees seem reluctant to use that method. There is concern that the corporate failure of Carillion will create an even more risk-averse climate.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** I apologise for missing the start of my hon. Friend’s excellent speech. Does she agree that one of the issues is that the Pensions Regulator is unaccountable? I have had a particular issue given what has happened post-Carillion, and I have been trying to find out how the Pensions Regulator makes decisions, which is not at all clear. Does she agree that that needs to be brought up in this place so that there can be proper accountability?

**Laura Smith:** I thank my hon. Friend for making that point. From my conversation with the Minister before the debate, I am sure he will be happy to talk about that in his speech and when he meets the Pensions Regulator.

The Green Paper shows that there has been a clear decline in gilt yields over the past two decades. The public sector trade union, Unison, is of the view that most schemes that did not hedge their risk should seriously consider using that discount rate method.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I congratulate the hon. Lady on bringing this matter to the Chamber. On average, people believe that their living expenses will account for 34% of their pension, yet they will actually account for 49%. Does she agree that more should be done to ensure that people make the most of pension schemes by paying in themselves? I think that is the thrust of what she is saying—that individuals should make more effort rather than relying on employer contributions, which in many cases have been found to be suspect.

**Laura Smith:** I apologise to the hon. Gentleman—it was hard to hear him because of the sound of the fans. I will come on to those points.

Basing assumptions on gilts may artificially inflate deficits and future service costs for the sponsoring employer and scheme members. That may lead to the unnecessary closure of schemes to new members and future benefit accrual. Unison’s experience is that some employers would rather pay more and use the increase in costs as an excuse to close their DB scheme, saving money by transferring members into a DC scheme with lower employer contributions, which results in reduced pension benefits for scheme members.

Not only are DB schemes desirable, but they can be affordable and good value for money. We should do everything we can to protect them. The Government’s role should be to provide an adequate regulatory framework, meaningful enforcement and appropriate incentives to help encourage sound decision making and ultimately to provide decent pensions. I welcome the Government’s White Paper and the regulator’s ambition to be clearer, quicker and tougher.

I hope that the Minister can provide me with a little more clarity or reassurance about three issues. First, there appears to be no new relief for employers struggling with DB liabilities. Although I welcome the suggestion that there should be penalties for directors who do not take sufficient care of scheme members’ interests, without support for struggling employers, tougher rules may simply incentivise more of them to close DB schemes in favour of DC schemes with inferior pensions for workers. Secondly, what additional resources are being provided to ensure TPR has the capability and capacity to effectively regulate the sector?

Thirdly, encouraging consolidation over alternative options would not prioritise the protection of members’ benefits, which should be the Government’s primary focus. I understand that insurance buy-out remains the best solution for guaranteeing member benefits in DB schemes. Securing member benefits should be paramount. With an insurer, members are almost certain to receive their benefits in full. The Association of British Insurers believes that prices are the best consultants have ever seen, and that that option is available to smaller schemes.

Although I understand there is a need to provide options for employers that simply cannot secure a buy-out, any new framework should not incentivise consolidation purely on the basis that it is a cheaper option. The risk of investment failure was highlighted by the Pension Protection Fund in a submission to the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. In the absence of a substantive employer, the security of members is entirely dependent on the investment performance of the fund and the associated buffer. Consolidation is therefore less secure than buy-out, and profit withdrawal in years of good investment returns may lead to scheme failure by preventing a strong build-up of reserves.
Consolidation also means that risk, rather than being dispersed across several schemes, becomes focused on one investment strategy. Different consolidators may be inclined to pursue the same investment strategy, resulting in a high correlation of risk in the DB sector. Obviously, that may lead to all schemes failing at the same time. I am also concerned that younger members may shoulder the risk of commercial consolidators collapsing. We should not pursue any policy that leads to greater intergenerational unfairness.

To put it plainly, I am concerned that the option to consolidate or transfer into a super-fund may be seen by some employers as another boathole to escape their liabilities on the cheap.

Julian Knight (Solihull) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for securing this important debate. She is making a very good speech in many respects, but one of the concerns about DB schemes is that some that have existed for a long time have few members but a large legacy. A scheme may have only 100 employees, for example, but a very large legacy behind it. I wonder whether she recognises that super-consolidation may be an option for such schemes.

Laura Smith: I touched on why I have concerns about that.

As I said, securing member benefits should be paramount. What reassurance can the Minister give me that the eventual framework will ensure that employers’ decisions are focused on that objective? If an employer has the means to get a buy-out and that is the best way to guarantee scheme members’ benefits, it should get a buy-out. We need a framework that incentivises decision making on that basis.

Will any legislation that is enacted be applied retrospectively to cover commercial consolidators formed in the intervening period? I am concerned that a two-tier system of regulation would provide loopholes for those willing to exploit them. Directors of sponsoring employers must have personal liability—there must be criminal offences and heavy fines.

I support the White Paper’s push for clearer, quicker and tougher regulation. I commend the Minister’s efforts and I hope that the White Paper leads to measures that further protect defined-benefit pensions. However, I remain concerned that over-zealous prudence and assumptions threaten otherwise affordable DB schemes. There should be additional support and relief for struggling schemes. I would like to be confident that TPR will be given the resources it needs to have the capability and capacity to regulate effectively in the light of any changes. I am concerned that consolidation—although it may be the best option for some schemes—will be seen as an acceptable cheaper option that does not prioritise protecting scheme members’ benefits when more secure alternatives, such as buy-out, are available and within the means of the employer.

We must endeavour to build a framework that incentivises workers to save responsibly and deters directors from behaving irresponsibly. Paying dividends must not be prioritised at the expense of protecting pensions. I would be grateful if the Minister responded to the issues I have outlined and committed to looking into the ongoing matter at Bentley Motors, which is of concern to more than 1,000 people in Crewe and Nantwich who work for the company, and to working with me to promote a dialogue that has the protection of scheme members’ benefits at its heart.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): Order. The debate can last until 5.30 pm. I advise Members that we expect a Division at about 5 o’clock, in which case the debate will be extended by 15 minutes. If there is no Division, I am due to call the Front-Bench spokespeople at 5.08 pm, with the guideline limits being five minutes for the Scottish National party, five minutes for Her Majesty’s Opposition and 10 minutes for the Minister, leaving Laura Smith two or three minutes to sum up the debate.

There are four speakers seeking to catch my eye, one of whom has left the Chamber. We will start with Paul Masterton.

4.40 pm

Paul Masterton (East Renfrewshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. For the 10 years before I was elected, I was a pensions specialist solicitor. I must say to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) that, for someone who claims not to be an expert, she demonstrated an incredible grasp of the key issues in a good opening speech, which certainly puts me to shame.

When we talk about protecting DB schemes, it is worth remembering that the fiduciary duty on the part of trustees is to protect the benefits already built up. Their responsibility is to ensure that the benefits accrued can be paid, not to ensure that an employer continues with ongoing DB provision. That is fundamentally an employment matter. On many occasions, the best way to protect DB benefits is to reduce future accrual, to close the scheme or—in the most nuclear option—to tip the employer into insolvency and have the scheme move into the Pension Protection Fund, so we must be careful about what we mean by protecting DB benefits and DB schemes.

It goes without saying that DB schemes face major challenges, and the Government have recognised that through the Green Paper and then the White Paper. When the Green Paper came out, I was not sure whether I agreed with the statement that DB schemes were not largely unaffordable simply due to my case load in the office at that time. Generally, the system works well for most employers, but we need a tougher approach for those failing to act responsibly.

I am pleased that the regulator was granted many of the powers it sought, because one of my big frustrations in practice was that it was largely toothless. It would send a lot of letters and have conference calls. Those who were really unfortunate would be dragged down to Brighton for an awful meeting where nothing really happened.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): My hon. Friend will be pleased to know that I am not being dragged but going voluntarily down to Brighton. When the Pensions Regulator was established, this Thursday for a proper five-hour sit-down. In that, I will certainly take up some of the concerns of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith),
Paul Masterton: I am pleased to hear that, because the Pensions Regulator performs a vital role in overseeing occupational pension schemes. One of the big frustrations on the employer side—not usually on the employer side—was that the regulator did not seem to have the time or resources to get stuck in or do anything serious to encourage or require an employer to change course. Some of the suggested improvements are very good.

In the past, pension schemes operated in a world of high interest rates and good equity returns. We now live in a different world. Investment decisions reflect ongoing uncertainty and volatility, which has led to widespread de-risking and a preference for investing in bonds and gilts. That has been a huge loss to the UK economy, with funding being taken out of equities. We could do more to look at how to unlock some of the vast sums that sit behind pension schemes.

Julian Knight: Does my hon. Friend share my frustration that often UK infrastructure is owned by overseas pension schemes and that, despite exhortations from the Government for schemes to invest more in the UK and in these stable, high-producing assets, they still seem reluctant to do so?

Paul Masterton: I do. Big pension funds—Canadian pension schemes and many others—invest a lot, and those investment projects provide good returns. We could unlock huge amounts of money.

Final salary pension schemes will end up in one of two places. They will either be successful and be bought out with an insurance company or fail and end up in the PPF. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was right that deficits have been pushed up by low gilt yields and low interest rates. Many employers, pushed by their trustees, and to a certain extent by the regulator, have prudent assumptions in their valuation setting, which increases the amount they have to pay in. That can provide a false picture of the deficit, but it does match the reality of trying to buy on the market. There is a link. I look forward to hearing the good story the Minister has to tell on what the Government are doing.

4.47 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) on securing the debate and the excellent way in which she introduced it. Once again, she has proved to be a formidable advocate for her constituents. I do not intend to cover the same ground but will instead raise an issue facing one of my constituents that also affects thousands of members of defined-benefit pension schemes who are not entitled to any protection against raises in the cost of living.

My constituent, Mr Thorpe, is one of a significant number of members of the Foster Wheeler defined-benefit pension plan. Members of the scheme have received no increase in their pensions since 2002. This issue is not restricted to a single scheme—those with defined-benefit pensions accrued before 1997 are not entitled to any statutory inflation protection. While many enjoy discretionary increases, about 100,000 pre-1997 pensions receive no increase, because before then any increases were based on the rules of the scheme only. That remains the position for pensions earned before that date.

If the rules provide for increases, whether fixed rate or index-linked, they must continue to be paid. However, in the same way, if a scheme does not make such provision, none will be paid. In a number of schemes, increases are paid at the discretion of either the trustees or the employer, which leaves the living standards of thousands of people in our country not protected by law but subject to the discretion of others.

To illustrate the impact, Mr Thorpe provided me with a simple calculation based on the case of a fellow Foster Wheeler pensioner. We will say that this chap is called John. He retired in 2002 at the age of 60 and his pension at the age of retirement was £10,000 per annum.
In 2017, when he was aged 75, the purchasing power of that pension was down to £5,600 per annum. By 2027, when he is aged 85, the purchasing power of John’s pension is likely to be less than £3,000 per annum—a 70% fall in the value of the pension over the course of his retirement. That has an impact on only a relatively small number of pensioners who paid into their pensions during a specific period of time but, as I hope I have illustrated, it has a massive impact on those individuals.

We face a situation not unlike that of the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign, in which people find themselves at a disadvantage simply because they were born in a particular timeframe or had worked prior to the introduction of particular legislation. When I wrote to the Minister, his response stated that he did not think that it would be right “to consider retrospective changes to the rules on indexation”.

Given that the analysis by the House of Commons Library found that in 2015 FTSE 100 companies paid five times as much in dividends as they did in contributions to defined-benefit pension schemes, will he look again at what seems to be a very unfair situation? Employers should have a duty to do right by their employees and pensioners before they consider rewarding shareholders.

My constituent, Mr Thorpe, states that research indicates that the cost of inflation protecting the Foster Wheeler pre-1997 pensioners would be around £1 million per 1% awarded. That is a modest and sustainable cost for a fund with a value of almost £3 billion. Thousands of pre-1997 pensioners were extremely disappointed to see that the White Paper does not propose any solutions to defined-benefit pension schemes, will he look again at that issue. As I hope I have illustrated, it has a massive impact on those individuals.

Mr Rubenstein’s management of that has been pretty exceptional. The PPF has been well managed, but frankly it can take only so much. A lifeboat can take only so many passengers. The difficulty is, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire noted, that 3 million members face potentially only a 50% chance of having their pension. The more we load into a lifeboat and the greater the burden on other funds, the more likely they are to collapse in turn.

We need a longer-term solution, and we need to focus on the 2,000 schemes with fewer than 100 members. I believe conversion is a good idea. However, I take the point of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich that perhaps the current models of conversion, which to a certain extent are zombie funds, are not the way we want to go. What we need is to transfer to scale, so that the returns come through back office. More than that, potentially, there is my big idea—I have written to the Minister about this before and he will not be particularly surprised that I mention it—of rebasing some work-based pensions over time, so that we end up putting everything on a sustainable footing. We could also adapt schemes to the modern world in terms of spousal pensions and, I would suggest, the potential provision of social care.

The tail is wagging the dog. We have a statutory architecture built for a system where people had jobs for life and DB schemes were ongoing entities. For increasing numbers of schemes, retired and deferred members far outweigh active members. Employers are not members, and members are not employees. In that context, the direct link between the employer and the scheme makes diminishing sense. Of the £80 billion or so paid into workplace pensions, around three quarters of which is in respect of DB schemes, nearly half goes to the public sector, yet active membership of DB schemes is now down to just 7 million workers and is falling daily.

We need to break the link. First, we should establish a universal benefit structure, or a kind of common denominator pension, based on a common structure—for example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%. We would then go through the time-consuming and laborious process of valuing existing DB schemes by reference to that universal scheme on an actuarially neutral basis. For example, a one-sixtieth or one-eighthieth scheme, with 50% spousal pension and consumer prices index inflation-proofing up to 5%.
It would have been better if, at an earlier stage, those considerable benefits had been converted to, say, a £5,000 pension in a new scheme. People would not lose their pension initially, and hopefully not at all. Instead, it would be simplified and moved on to a surer footing. That is one point for the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, who talked about consolidation schemes. We could invest in very large schemes indeed. Some of the governance in some of the smaller schemes with fewer than 100 members is frankly very amateur. It is pitiful and almost mothballed.

If we were to have larger schemes, privately run by something such as a type of National Employment Savings Trust, with Government involvement on the board and oversight by regulators, we could move to a situation where we all feel more invested and know exactly what we are getting. Crucially, we could rebase to enable us to provide better futures for spouses.

Another area I will mention is that we could offer a social care option. If I had a very large scheme involving maybe 500,000 to 1 million members, I would have the scale to offer a social care option. I could say to someone, “At the moment you will get a pension of £10,000 per year. What we will do is to give you a pension of £8,000 per year, but we will invest through our scheme, because we have scale and can do so.”

4.58 pm

Sitting suspended for a division in the House.

5.8 pm

On resuming—

Julian Knight: I apologise. We were so rudely interrupted by the Liberal Democrats.

The effective remodelling of these almost-zombie DB schemes could be a means by which we ostensibly kick-start a different approach to social care and allow people to choose whether to supplement their social care in the long term by actively deciding to put away a certain amount of pension in order to receive a certain amount of social care insurance. There are all sorts of options for that.

I conclude by saying that the Green Paper and White Paper were refreshing and thoughtful. We have an opportunity to do something that the Turner report did not do—it dealt mostly with public finances and the state pension—which is to shift the balance and the focus on to private sector workplace pension schemes. We need them to play a role, but we also need to repair the problems of the past.

Mr Philip Hollobone (in the Chair): We now come to the first of the Front-Bench speeches. The new finish time for the debate, because of the Division, is 5.40 pm.

5.9 pm

Mhairi Black (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) on bringing to Westminster Hall such an important debate and such a good-natured debate—it feels like a while since we have had one of those in this place.

There is agreement. Everyone recognises that DB schemes have been in decline for the past 15 years. I would like to give a bit of perspective on the numbers. The 1.3 million active, contributing members of private sector DB schemes account for only about 10% of the total 13.5 million private sector DB memberships. That gives people an idea of just what the burden is on those who have not yet retired under these schemes.

I also agree that there are many factors as to why DB schemes have declined as they have. There have been umpteen tax and regulatory changes and legislative changes. There have been changes in the financial market; there was the financial crisis in 2008. Ultimately people are living longer, which has a huge impact on pensions in general.

I was very happy when I read in the Green Paper the Government saying that DB pensions are certainly not unaffordable. It is a case of being realistic and seeing what we can do. Pensions have not always worked out as planned, as I have seen since I have been looking at and working on pensions. However, it is good that the Green Paper said that the evidence in relation to unaffordability was far from conclusive.

The hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) explained something really well in saying how we can rebuild, restructure and consolidate these things to have a realistic and practical approach to how to answer some of the questions that are being flung up. I will explain where the scepticism comes from. He used a phrase that stuck out when he said that we need to know “exactly what we are getting”. I think that is all that anyone ever looks for when it comes to dealing with their pension, but unfortunately the goalposts continually move. That is the problem with pensions in general, not only DB schemes, just now. The goalposts are constantly moving, so it does not matter whether it is five years or 30 years down the line; people will probably have a very different deal from the one that they signed up to.

Let me give an example as to why it is right to be sceptical of some of these companies. In 2015, FTSE 100 companies paid about five times as much in dividends as they did in contributions to their DB pension schemes. The 56 FTSE 100 companies with a DB pension scheme deficit paid 25% more in dividends. Therefore, in theory, these companies would have the ability to repair immediately their pension scheme deficits were they to feed their dividends into deficit repair contributions.

I was very grateful to see the Government set out in the White Paper an approach that would involve enforcing a stricter body of regulation—tougher rules, tougher legislation, proactive powers—so that the Pensions Regulator could intervene quickly and effectively. All those things are tremendous steps in the right direction. However, if we recognise the reality of what the financial market is like just now, failures such as Carillion, BHS and even, more recently, Toys “R” Us show that this situation can become very toxic very quickly.

It is clear that the UK Government did not have a robust enough system to protect savers. What we are seeing now is only the start of steps in the right direction—towards having a robust enough system. As we know, the loss of pension savings can shatter an entire life in the days when people should be enjoying life most. We have to take this issue very seriously, which is why one of the disappointments of the White Paper was that at no point did it mention Brexit. We will probably all have
differing views as to what Brexit will mean for the UK. Brexit could well be the answer to pensions; it could solve everything, but I still think it is right for us to see some detail of it or some Government predictions. What effect will this really big change have practically on our pensions day to day? For an entire White Paper not even to mention Brexit stood out.

Just now, 300,000 more pensioners are in poverty. That is the first sustained increase in pensioner poverty in 20 years. The UK has a wider than average gender pensions gap. We see that with things such as the WASPI Campaign and throughout all the different aspects of pensions policy. As I have said, the publication of the White Paper is welcome, but a sense of urgency seems to be lacking in this Tory UK Government. The Department for Work and Pensions itself has said that the legislation needed to enact the new regime will not be ready until, at the earliest, 2019-20. That means that until then unscrupulous businesses seeking to avoid their pension obligations might find it easier to do so.

I will conclude my remarks with something that I have said many times. The Minister is probably fed up of hearing us ask for this, but the SNP has long called for the establishment of an independent pensions commission, so that we can take a step back from pensions and look at the issue holistically and from a totally fresh point of view in order to see whether we can do anything radically different. That said, I think the Government are heading in the right direction, so I hope that they reflect on the comments made today.

5.15 pm

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith). She is a great champion of her constituency, and Bentley workers will be proud of her for bringing their cause to Parliament today.

I dealt 40 years ago with Rolls-Royce—the Mulliner Park Ward factory in Hythe Road on the Park Royal estate. The craftsmen were outstanding. They were the salt of the earth. They were highly skilled, producing cars that were quite remarkable. Since the move to Crewe, it has been generally a successful company, but right now, 1,200 members of the DB fund face an absolutely unacceptable threat to their future pension entitlements. These people have a minimum service of 16 years and a maximum of 47 years. I share their sense of anger at what is happening.

Former employees of Rolls-Royce Motors, which was then sold to Volkswagen, now face serious financial hardship in retirement. They will potentially lose tens of thousands of pounds. Although the Crewe site has received billions in investment, the DB fund has moved from surplus to deficit in the time of its ownership by Volkswagen. Volkswagen remains the parent company, with ultimate responsibility. Would it treat its employees Volkswagen? Volkswagen remains the parent company, with ultimate responsibility. Would it treat its employees according to the rules of the book or in that way? I very much doubt it.

Negotiations continue at Bentley. I urge the company to move, and to move substantially, at the next stages, because the levels achieved thus far through the negotiations go nowhere near the losses that many will suffer. In particular, young workers in the scheme will suffer very badly indeed.

Sadly, what is happening at Bentley is a symbol of the wider problem of decline in DB schemes. The percentage of DB pension schemes open to new members fell from 43% in 2006 to 13% in 2015. The number of DB schemes in the UK will shrink to less than a fifth of current levels over the next quarter of a century, according to predictions by Hymans Robertson.

In a very positive speech by the Pensions Minister to the Trades Union Congress conference on pensions, he argued—I think he was right—that DB provision was working well and employers should seek to continue their responsibilities to their employees by maintaining good DB schemes. Would that more employers heeded that advice.

It is absolutely wrong for wealthy companies, with well-funded DB schemes, which many of them have, to look to close those and move to DC pensions purely to transfer the risk from the employer to the employee. That is all the more wrong when we look at the data released in June, which showed that among FTSE 100 companies, DB pension schemes have reached 100% funding and, among all private sector DB pensions, they are 98% funded. Clearly, the majority of them are now healthy and sustainable. Companies should look to do the best by their workers, and the best pension for their workers is a DB pension. They should, therefore, continue to accept their responsibilities and, I stress again, not simply transfer them on to the backs of their employees.

There are wider consequences to the decline of DB. The erosion of good, well-funded DB schemes has left few workers with a solid final salary pension scheme guaranteed to provide them with an income until they die. The UK has the fourth highest share of pensioner household income received from private pensions and other forms of capital, such as home ownership. As the prevalence of DB schemes and the rate of home ownership fall rapidly, however, the next generation will face considerable financial challenges, including in retirement.

Auto-enrolment has been introduced in parallel to what has happened to DB. It was a triumph by a Labour Government, and I warmly welcome the continuity of policy under this Government. Auto enrolment has seen 9.7 million more people in pension schemes, saving for retirement. While that move has been immensely positive, it has meant more workers saving into DC schemes. We do not want to see that pose against good DB schemes—on the contrary.

A Pensions Policy Institute report in 2016 found that the median saving of DC scheme members could yield only £3,000 a year as an annuity, which is not a lot of money to live on in retirement. The contrast between historical, good DB schemes and many of the current DC schemes is stark indeed. More work needs to be done, therefore, to improve the adequacy of returns on DC savings, including by looking in more depth at costs and charges.

Collective defined-contribution schemes are an important alternative to the current DC world. While not as secure as traditional DB, CDC provides workers with the opportunity to share the risk associated with their pension investments, as well as the ambition of an income in retirement, which DC can never do. Royal Mail and the Communication Workers Union—to their great credit—have been working to form an agreement,
[Jack Dromey]

which would be the first CDC scheme in the UK. That would forge a new and exciting pathway to a better pension for Royal Mail's 142,000 workers.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Pensions Minister and the Government on the passage of the necessary secondary legislation, to enable CDC schemes to be formed, and to work with Royal Mail and the CWU to ensure the best possible scheme for their workers is put in place as quickly as possible. That is a landmark development. It opens up immense opportunities at the next stages. We will encourage many employers—including on a sectoral basis—to take that path. I stress again, if DC is not as good as DB, CDC is a damn sight better than ordinary DC schemes, but—the evidence overwhelmingly shows—still not as good as good DB schemes. We therefore do not want one to be posed against the other. This is a new option and alternative, developed in particular circumstances, which we think others will follow at the next stages.

If responsibility falls on employers, there is also a responsibility on Government. I agree with the tone of this debate and some of the comments made. The DB White Paper is a step in the right direction—no doubt—in seeking to live up to the challenge of protecting good DB schemes, and ensuring they continue to thrive and maintain their members' benefits.

I welcome a number of the proposals in the White Paper, such as criminal sanctions for directors neglecting pensions schemes. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich was right to question precisely how that would work for potential incomes, given unforeseen circumstances. I welcome the proposals for stronger powers for the Pensions Regulator, with which we had a constructive meeting here last week. I welcome the proposals for clearer standards on scheme funding and for scheme consolidation. I think the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) is right that consolidation and, therefore, economies of scale, offer significant prospects at the next stages. I welcome the moves towards cost transparency.

However, there are concerns about the White Paper, for example, the reluctance, at this stage, to build on voluntary clearance and corporate takeovers. We recently had the scandal of the hostile takeover of GKN by Melrose. The issue of 50-50 member nominated trustees should have been in the White Paper, but it was not. It remains a strong ambition of the Labour party. We should have been in the White Paper, but it was not. It was a landmark development. It opens up immense opportunities at the next stages. We will encourage many employers—including on a sectoral basis—to take that path. I stress again, if DC is not as good as DB, CDC is a damn sight better than ordinary DC schemes, but—the evidence overwhelmingly shows—still not as good as good DB schemes. We therefore do not want one to be posed against the other. This is a new option and alternative, developed in particular circumstances, which we think others will follow at the next stages.

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I welcome a number of the proposals in the White Paper, such as criminal sanctions for directors neglecting pensions schemes. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich was right to question precisely how that would work for potential incomes, given unforeseen circumstances. I welcome the proposals for stronger powers for the Pensions Regulator, with which we had a constructive meeting here last week. I welcome the proposals for clearer standards on scheme funding and for scheme consolidation. I think the hon. Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) is right that consolidation and, therefore, economies of scale, offer significant prospects at the next stages. I welcome the moves towards cost transparency.

However, there are concerns about the White Paper, for example, the reluctance, at this stage, to build on voluntary clearance and corporate takeovers. We recently had the scandal of the hostile takeover of GKN by Melrose. The issue of 50-50 member nominated trustees should have been in the White Paper, but it was not. It remains a strong ambition of the Labour party. We hoped to see stronger commitments to mandatory cost transparency for trustees in DB schemes. Another concern was the review of the Pension Regulator's valuation procedure and some of the problems that emerged, for example, over the rather conservative interpretation in the universities, which made it more difficult to reach a settlement in that dispute.

There is much in the White Paper that is good and that we welcome. We have ambitions, however, at the next stages. Employers and Government have responsibilities. The most reliable route to a secure and sustainable retirement remains a DB pension. I say to Bentley, workers are the beating heart of any company. Bentley and other wealthy and prestigious companies need to look again at how they treat workers, who are essential to the success of their companies, and investigate every possible route to keeping their DB pension scheme open.

That is why I strongly urge Bentley to think again. Bentley—of all companies—should be ashamed of itself for behaving this way in relation to its workers' pensions.

5.27 pm  The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Guy Opperman): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hollobone. I thank the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) for three things: first, for bringing this important debate forward; secondly, for entitlement to debate, “Protecting defined-benefit schemes,” when we have a White Paper on that exact point, which allows me to address that; and thirdly, for being complimentary and measured in the way that she approached a serious problem for her constituents.

It has been an interesting week in Parliament. Two Cabinet Ministers have resigned, Donald Trump is President and arrives in this country on Thursday, and a Conservative Minister has received not one, but two compliments for a speech at TUC house. I do not know which is the more remarkable of those events. I greatly enjoyed my time at TUC towers. I made it out alive and look forward to the return invite from the comrades, when they want me to further elucidate the way ahead. It was an honour to speak at Congress House. I genuinely wanted to do it and I would welcome the opportunity to return.

The debates give me the opportunity to talk about defined benefits in the round. I will then try to address all the individual points raised. The DB schemes provide an important source of income in the retirement plans of millions of people. In the private sector alone, 10.5 million members rely on such schemes, with around £1.5 trillion-worth of assets under management. That helps to fuel the UK economy, whether through corporate bonds, Government bonds or equities.

We fundamentally believe that the system is working well in the majority of cases for the employers, the trustees and, importantly, the scheme members. I stress, however, that while we already have a robust and resilient system of pensions protection in place in the United Kingdom, we want it to work in the interests of everyone. While it is not always possible to get that balance right, nor to prevent insolvency, where insolvency occurs we should never forget that we have the Pension Protection Fund, set up in 2005 and taken forward under successive Governments. It has utterly transformed the landscape for so many people who would have been desperately vulnerable and affected previously. For the avoidance of doubt among everyone reading the debate, the PPF compensation scheme ensures that individuals receive at least 90% of their pension benefits.¹

To ensure that the DB system is sustainable in the long term and future-proof, we have addressed the key challenges and opportunities in our 2017 Green Paper and published our White Paper, as I said earlier, which sets out our conclusions, which effectively fall into three core areas: increasing member protection, improving scheme funding and exploring options around consolidation.

The key proposals strengthen the Pensions Regulator’s powers, as set out in the Government’s manifesto, and give the regulator new powers to punish those who deliberately put their pension schemes at risk. For the worst offenders, that could mean criminal sanctions.

¹[Official Report, 9 October 2018, Vol. 647, c. 1MC.]
We will strengthen the system that enables the regulator to oversee corporate transactions, which will mean that it will be aware of more types of transactions, and it will find out about them earlier, so that it can intervene at the right time. It will also mean that employers must explain how they have taken account of their pensions in relevant corporate transactions.

On corporations and dividends, which the hon. Member for Paisley and Renfrewshire South (Mhairi Black) raised, she will be aware that although we are not against a healthy company paying out dividends, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is undertaking a consultation on insolvency and corporate governance specifically. That ongoing consultation looks at how the framework of distributable profits could be improved. That Department will respond in due course—my expectation is that that will probably be in September.

I take issue with the hon. Lady’s point on pensioner poverty, as I think I have done before. In the 1970s, pensioner poverty was at 40%. It is now down to 16%—close to historical lows. That is clearly still too high, but it is a dramatic improvement on the previous position.

On scheme funding, defined-benefit pension trustees must report their funding position to the regulator. The Pensions Regulator can use anti-avoidance powers, including contribution notices and financial support directives. We accept that that process has to be improved—there is no doubt about that—so there will be clearer requirements and more explicit accountability, which should lead to positive changes in behaviour among employers and trustees. We will give the regulator the power to enforce clearer funding standards and to take action if trustees or sponsor employers fail to comply.

The regulator will produce a revised DB funding code for public consultation, which will be clearer about some key issues that cause confusion. The trustees will also be required to appoint a chair who must submit a chair’s statement with the scheme’s triennial valuation. We will work with the regulator and others to consider what can be done to promote greater transparency of costs in DB schemes and to support trustees in communicating more clearly with their members on scheme funding issues.

On consolidation, benefits of scale can help schemes to reduce costs per member, improve governance and enable access to more effective investment strategies. There are already several ways for DB schemes to consolidate, such as DB master trusts, which the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) and I debated earlier. As the White Paper announced, we are considering ways to raise awareness of the benefits of consolidation among employers and trustees. In addition, the industry is actively looking at ways to innovate and is proposing new models of consolidation such as super-funds, as hon. Members will be aware.

I stress that the White Paper made it clear that consolidation must be done in a safe way, which is why we are looking to introduce clear parameters within which those vehicles can operate, as well as a supporting authorisation and supervisory regime. Any transfer to a consolidator would require the consent of the transferring scheme’s trustees, who would need to take a considered view, along with the sponsoring employer, on whether consolidation could improve outcomes for their members.

I will try to address some of the key points of the debate. In relation to collective defined-contribution schemes, which were raised by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington, it is right to say that the Government are open to working together with the Communication Workers Union and the Royal Mail, which I have met together, and to say that I have been impressed by how much they are joined at the hip. We wish to assist them in finding a way forward to CDCs. Everybody understands that there is a way to go, but they are clearly an option. We will continue to assist by way of Government time.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich raised the issue of the regulator’s powers and whether it had the capacity to take them forward. I should make it clear that it will have an additional £3 million of funding to boost its frontline resource, which will result in more than 40 new members of staff. It is taking on more cases, and its proactive work has increased by 90% this year. It has made four successful prosecutions for non-provision of information, and has secured more than £1 billion in settlement through the use of anti-avoidance powers, including cases such as BHS, which secured £363 million, and Lehman Brothers, which secured £184 million. It has also prosecuted a number of scammers and the like.

There were a couple of other quick points. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) wanted more contributions to be made, and auto-enrolment is clearly the answer to that. The hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) wanted greater accountability for the Pensions Regulator, and I will write to him about that.

It is fair to say that my hon. Friend the Member for East Renfrewshire (Paul Masterton) is the No. 1 pensions expert in the House of Commons. He is very much after my job and I accept the challenge. I agree with a great deal of what he said. Likewise, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Julian Knight) made a superb speech. He has bitten off an awful lot if he is going to solve social care on the back of a pensions revision, because that is a mighty challenge.

The hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders) is aware of the letter I wrote to him about Foster Wheeler. As for several other similar schemes in relation to pre-1997 indexation, I stand by that letter. We do not propose to intervene in a matter that is between the company and the individual employee. Clearly, however, I am happy to discuss that further with him.

I believe I have answered most of the points that were made. Clearly, this is a consultation. The White Paper is detailed and sets out comprehensively what we are trying to do, but we do not necessarily think that everything in it is perfect. We want to get people’s views and opinions, and I value the opportunity to briefly sketch out some of the key points. I want the case of the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich to be made in future. I will take the product of this debate to the Pensions Regulator when I spend the afternoon in Brighton on Thursday. I thank her for her time and for securing the debate.

5.37 pm

Laura Smith: I thank hon. Members for attending this important debate. It is great to hear the Minister respond to the issues that I raised, and I thank him,
especially for agreeing to meet me to discuss the ongoing issues at Bentley Motors. I also thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Jack Dromey) for his detailed response and for his continued efforts. I know he will continue to keep a close eye on the issue and to hold the Government to account.

Sustainable options need to be made available for smaller schemes, and I welcome some of the ambitious plans that the Minister and other hon. Members have clearly set out. My point was not that the policy should not be pursued, but that proper safeguards should be put in place to ensure that employers consider all the available options with a single focus on protecting the benefits for scheme members.

The debate has demonstrated that there is much common ground when it comes to defined-benefit pension schemes, which I welcome. I am also pleased that there has been great continuity of policy from the last Labour Government, which I hope continues.

The contributions of hon. Members have been interesting and informative. It is an incredibly complex topic, and it is incumbent on all of us to learn from each other and from the wealth of experience and expertise outside of this place to ensure that the Government pursue an evidence-based approach to protecting pension benefits for all our constituents.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,
That this House has considered protecting defined-benefit pension schemes.

5.38 pm
Sitting adjourned.
Trudy Harrison (Copeland) (Con): I beg to move, That this House has considered the nuclear sector deal.

Thank you for your chairmanship this morning, Mr Owen. I believe this is the first time I have served under your chairmanship and it is a pleasure to do so, especially as I know you have spoken often and enthusiastically about the nuclear sector and Wynfa’s Hitachi Horizon investment, which I also look forward to. I thank the Minister for his attendance today and his continued interest in and genuine support for my work both in Copeland and here in Westminster. I thank all Members for their contributions to the debate.

My interest in nuclear is personal, professional and political. In 1976, there was much more to celebrate than the long hot summer—it was the year that I was born in a small coastal village adjacent to Sellafield. It is fair to say that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the nuclear sector did not have the best image. My childhood was blighted by protests and anti-nuclear groups who advocated for all sites to be decommissioned and an end to civil nuclear energy generation. Growing up listening to my father’s explanations of the industry that he worked in as a commissioning engineer—I later followed—and understanding my husband’s precision skills honed over 39 years as a nuclear welder, as well as those of my brother, who works as a nuclear cyber-consultant, I know first hand how the area I proudly call home is quite rightly celebrated across the globe for nuclear excellence.

On Wednesday 17 October 1956, Queen Elizabeth II officially opened Calder Hall, the world’s first nuclear-powered electricity station, in my Copeland constituency, on what is now known as the Sellafield site. Britain’s civil nuclear sector was born. Some 62 years on, the industry has suffered decline. At an all-time low in 2003, it could have been seen off completely. This Government seems to have come to their senses and recognise the economic, environmental and social value of the nuclear industry. I have an incredible sense of pride in and optimism for the sector, and for Copeland in particular as the centre of nuclear excellence.

Of the 87,000 nuclear workers in the UK, 40%—some 27,000—live in Cumbria. Each worker gives an average £96,600 gross value added to the economy, as estimated by the Nuclear Industry Association and Oxford Economics. The Government’s nuclear sector deal fills me with a burning ambition. There is a great deal to be optimistic about, and many priorities that I have previously advocated. I am really pleased to see the potential for better collaboration between nuclear defence and nuclear civil, and many references to apprenticeships. It is a rare document, which both excites and instils pride, as this industry, which is equal to the automotive industry in economic output, is quite rightly recognised.

Moving to the content of the deal, the optimism for research and development across the industrial strategy is welcomed. The National Nuclear Laboratory is a world-leading centre in my Copeland constituency, based near Sellafield, where scientists, in collaboration with the University of Glasgow and Lynkeos Technology, have developed an innovation that uses cosmic particles to detect nuclear materials, which could revolutionise nuclear decommissioning and the storing of historical waste. It is being used to investigate the location of molten fuel within the Fukushima Daiichi plant in Japan. The technology is now being commercialised and is just one example of how Innovate UK R&D funding is being used to create commercially marketable, globally required products.

Recognition for better routes to market, retaining intellectual property and support for export and decommissioning, is long overdue. The techniques and skills for and innovative solutions to incredibly complex legacy challenges in difficult or impossible to work in environments are being met daily in and around Sellafield and the low-level waste repository. Being the world’s first to design, commission and operate, and then being the world’s first to decommission, brings unprecedented opportunities for UK plc. I want to ensure that the capability in this niche area is understood by the Government. It includes technology such as the self-climbing platform that Nuvia was involved with, created to remove each piece of concrete and steel from a 61 metre stack. The reverse engineering required to cut open the world’s oldest nuclear waste store, on which Babcock and Bechtel have collaborated alongside Sellafield, is another innovation.

Sellafield has become a visitor attraction in its own right, with scientists and engineers from across the world coming to see how nuclear excellence, safety and a local workforce have come together to deal with the most complex challenges. We are missing a huge opportunity if easy routes to commercialisation, an entrepreneurial spirit and much better support for small and medium-sized enterprises are not realised. The new framework to support the development and deployment of small modular reactors is brilliant. The concept of modular building with a pipeline and the potential to commercialise the technology offers substantial benefits, both nationally and internationally.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on bringing this debate to Westminster Hall. Does she agree that small modular reactors are not just a more concise way of producing nuclear power but are also an easier way to build in areas that are quite inaccessible, such as in my constituency, where we are looking for a third SMR?

Trudy Harrison: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. There is huge scope for small and medium reactors in Britain. Perhaps even more importantly, there is the opportunity for us to export skills in manufacturing and the deployment of modular reactors across the globe. But SMRs alone will not keep the lights on.

To ensure that we deal with the reality of an ageing network of existing nuclear reactors, increased power requirements and ever-inflating costs, it is essential to find new ways of developing and financing new nuclear. The implementation of a regulated asset base model
allows the Government to redefine new nuclear for the
UK. The RAB will allow the NuGen management
team, which is developing the Moorside plant in Copeland
with Government assurances, to create a UK entity
focused on a UK solution for UK consumers.

To secure the future of the third large-scale reactor in
the Generation III programme, Moorside requires the
regulated asset base to be implemented as soon as
possible to give certainty to investors. The sector deal
aims for a 30% reduction in the cost of new build
projects by 2030, alongside promoting a more competitive
supply chain, with more UK companies using advanced
manufacturing methods and entering domestic and export
markets for nuclear goods and services than ever before.

The global nuclear new build economy is worth around
£1.2 trillion. Harnessing the scientific and industrial
capability within Britain across the sector while recognising
the wider opportunities in the UK’s financial services
and regulatory frameworks would mean that this country
was geared up to take full advantage of such a huge
international market. I joined the Nuclear Safeguards Bill
Committee and spoke at every stage of the parliamentary
process. The Nuclear Safeguards Act 2018 puts Britain
in the driving seat for safeguards, security and safety,
with those all under the same roof—that of the Office
for Nuclear Regulation.

The many references to people in both the industrial
strategy and the nuclear sector deal signifies the huge
importance of continuing to develop world-class skills.
With an attrition rate of around 7,000 people each year
and an anticipated requirement for 100,000 nuclear
workers by 2021, it is essential to deliver on the proposed
investment in maths, digital and technical education.

The aim to attract a 40% female workforce by 2030 is
ambitious, especially considering the long way we have
to go. Today, women represent between 16% and 22% of
the nuclear industry workforce across the country.
HR procedures reflecting family-friendly policies will help
considerably, and Women in Nuclear, an organisation
in my constituency, is making significant progress in
that area. Nuclear licensed sites tend, by their nature,
to be coastal and rural, so all too often the essential
infrastructure for working parents is seriously lacking.
In my constituency, there are 4,054 under-fives, but only
1,347 childcare places. That is three children for every place.
The lack of high-quality, affordable and flexible childcare
is the reason why, 20 years ago, I left the nuclear industry.
I want to ensure that my four daughters and their generation
do not face barriers due to their gender or geography.

The nuclear sector deal gives us much hope that we
can ensure effective realisation so that the nuclear
companies, the UK, and communities more widely,
benefit. We must consider having a body with sufficient
scope and purpose, like the Nuclear Decommissioning
Authority—perhaps it could be renamed the nuclear
development authority—to create economic growth,
accelerate the clean-up mission and meet our energy needs.

I am delighted that a representative of Britain’s Energy
Coast Business Cluster is in the Chamber today. The
organisation actively supports the nuclear companies in
Cumbria and across the north-west arc. Its comment
about our nuclear opportunities and about Cumbria
demonstrates the transformation over decades:
“Cumbria, a great place to work...an even better place to live.”

Delivering on the intentions in the deal, legislating
for the regulated asset-base model, expanding the role
of the NDA and taking a long-term approach to the
industry will put us in the best position to create maximum
economic impact with job and energy security for future
generations. Thank you once again for your chairmanship,
Mr Owen. I thank colleagues from across the House for
being here, and I look forward to their contributions.

9.42 am

Luke Pollard (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy
Harrison) for securing this important debate. Nuclear
jobs are good jobs, and are often located in cities and
towns where good jobs in other sectors are rare. I welcome
the nuclear sector deal. I believe in a mixed energy policy
with a greater focus on renewables and carbon-minimising
generation from nuclear.

I am a fan of new nuclear, but my constituency is
home not to civil nuclear jobs but to defence jobs. Our
dockyard is the sole nuclear repair and refuelling facility
for the Royal Navy. Nuclear jobs are in demand, and
recruiters for civil nuclear regularly try to poach the
highly skilled people from our dockyard and the Royal
Navy. It is right that they do so, as Devonport’s nuclear
workers are among the best in the business. I pay tribute
to their work, which is often overlooked but is appreciated
by all those who value the contribution of our submarine
service—the bombers and the hunter-killers—to our
nation’s security.

Nuclear jobs are not in the heart of the capital like
financial services jobs. They are in the regions—the
north-west and the south-west—and rightly so. Although
I do not always agree with the high strike price for new
civil nuclear, there is no doubt in my mind that civil
nuclear has a bright future. However, I will confine my
remarks to defence nuclear, about which there is a bit
more uncertainty in my part of the world.

Military nuclear matters. I welcome the, albeit brief,
mention in the nuclear sector deal of greater co-operation
between civil and defence nuclear. I believe we need to
do much more to enhance collaboration and co-operation
between those two sectors—not just in research, but in
jobs, skills, training and, importantly, decommissioning.
The civil nuclear decommissioning programme rightly
enjoys cross-party support. The taxpayer has unlimited
liability to clean up the nation’s civil nuclear legacy and
the sites contaminated by our country’s exploration of
civil nuclear and its mastery of nuclear energy. It is right
that new nuclear has decommissioning costs built into it.

Although there has been progress on the civil side of
civil nuclear decommissioning, that has not been the case
with defence nuclear. Hon. Members may not know
that the UK still has every single nuclear submarine we
have ever had. It is time that the legacy of old submarines
was dealt with. Devonport dockyard in my constituency
has 13 laid-up nuclear submarines awaiting recycling.
Rosyth in Scotland has seven, and there are more to
come. In Devonport, the oldest sub in storage is
HMS Valiant. She is 54 years old, and was launched in
1963 at the height of the cold war. Many have been
stored for decades, including HMS Conqueror, which
famously sank the Belgrano in the Falklands war.

As a proud janner and a Plymouth lad, I have grown
up knowing about those subs, but far too many people
do not know about them. “Don’t they just go away?”
was how one person responded when I told them about the old subs. Well, no, they do not. Those nuclear submarines get stored because the UK has no funded programme to recycle them. Eight in Devonport still have nuclear fuel rods and have not been defueled yet.

Those old nuclear submarines pose no risk to local communities. It is worth stating that because, all too frequently in nuclear debates, there is a question about safety. There is no risk to our local communities, but we cannot ask Plymouth and Rosyth to look after those submarines indefinitely without a plan.

To make matters worse, time is running out. In the next five years, three more Trafalgar-class submarines will need to be stored somewhere, as they are being replaced by the Astute class, which is being built in Barrow. A decade later, the four Vanguard-class nuclear submarines—the Trident subs—will need to be stored when they are taken out of service and replaced by the new Dreadnought-class submarines. There is a pilot project under way to dismantle HMS Swiftsure—the submarine my old man served on—but after much delay the programme has been paused. Progress is not being made at the pace we need if we are to deal with the rest of the submarines.

The reason why I am taking us on this detour into military nuclear, rather than civil nuclear, which is the focus of the nuclear deal, is to make the case for greater collaboration between the defence and civil nuclear sectors. The workforce moves between the two sectors, as does the science of decommissioning, but at the moment the Government still deal with them in two distinct silos. There is efficiency in collaborating, but Ministers from all Governments—including my own in the past—have kept the two sectors apart. I say to the Minister that it is time for this generation of politicians and Ministers to grasp this issue and change it.

The need to deal with the nuclear legacy of our nation’s old nuclear submarines unites all parties. That is why I have launched a cross-party campaign with the hon. Members for Copeland and for Dunfermline and West Fife (Douglas Chapman) to deal with our nation’s military nuclear legacy. We sent a joint letter to the Prime Minister and other party leaders asking them to commit to fund a proper programme of recycling the submarines. That is the key part of the deal, is it not?

The Minister has agreed to meet me and the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) to discuss this topic, and I think that there is a positive way forward. We need to acknowledge that nuclear submarines exist and need to be dealt with; there is an existing structure of principles and of funding; and, importantly, there is a cross-party basis for any future agreement about the recycling of the submarines. I ask the Minister and his officials to look carefully at how the work can be extended so that that legacy can be dealt with once and for all.

Above all, this is in the national interest. Plymouth and Rosyth cannot be asked to store old nuclear submarines indefinitely. That is why we need a properly funded plan, using the same principles as civil nuclear clean-up. The submarines must be recycled safely, sustainably and securely. I think the public are genuinely surprised and concerned to hear about the existence of these submarines. I invite hon. Members to look on Google Maps at the west side of Plymouth. They will see the submarines lined up alongside each other. When they see them there, they will realise that we have to do something about them. Not knowing about them has meant that we have been able to ignore them, but we cannot ignore them any longer.

There is only one mention of submarines in the nuclear sector deal, which I appreciate was written to look in particular at the civil nuclear side. That mention was of the equipment qualification, and while I agree with the thrust of it that greater expertise and applicability, as well as agile companies in our nuclear sector, will enhance British competitiveness, there is a market at home for nuclear decommissioning work, even before we look for new markets abroad.

The Minister has agreed to meet me and the hon. Members for Copeland and for Dunfermline and West Fife to discuss this topic, and I think that there is a positive way forward. We need to acknowledge that nuclear submarines exist and need to be dealt with; there is an existing structure of principles and of funding; and, importantly, there is a cross-party basis for any future agreement about the recycling of the submarines. I ask the Minister and his officials to look carefully at how the work can be extended so that that legacy can be dealt with once and for all.

9.50 am

**John Stevenson** (Carlisle) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing the debate on an issue that is important nationally, regionally and of course to her constituency.

I welcome the nuclear sector deal. Clearly, it is not a panacea, but it is an important and significant deal which will undoubtedly help the sector—in many respects it is a signpost for the industry. The implications will not only be positive and raise the profile of the sector, but demonstrate to a wider audience the worth of the nuclear industry and its significance.

A key part of the Government’s industrial strategy has, without doubt, to relate to energy: energy is vital to ensure that the industrial strategy works for the country. It also relates to energy security, and importantly, to ensuring that we have a proper base supply of nuclear energy, but with the right price so that the industry can be competitive and residential users can benefit.
The central parts of the nuclear sector deal that I think are important for my constituents relate to skills, R&D and the supply chain, so I will be a little parochial and touch on Cumbria. In many respects, Cumbria has two USPs—unique selling points—tourism and the nuclear industry. They are of similar economic value to the county, at about £3 billion each. The real challenge for Cumbria is to ensure that the nuclear deal benefits not just one part but the whole of the county. That is why research and development is so important—we can be a world leader, and already have many innovations and developments in Cumbria. Sellafield is at the forefront of decommissioning, and the skills that come from that are so important, not only to Cumbria but to the wider industry. We must not forget the importance of the defence industry and BAE Systems down in Barrow, which demonstrates that Cumbria is home to the whole spectrum of the nuclear industry. The third element is new build, and we would like to see NuGen get on with developing the new power station in Cumbria, which will directly benefit the whole country as well as the county.

The nuclear sector deal must be looked at not in isolation, but in terms of its importance for the wider economy. It can influence the supply chain, and in my constituency we have a couple of examples: Bendalls Engineering, a significant supply chain enterprise for Sellafield, and Clark Doors Ltd, which innovates in door technology and has built a relationship with Sellafield and the nuclear industry. There is also the benefit of employment opportunities, which go beyond nuclear and into professional services and the supply chain. Importantly for Cumbria and the national economy, we must maximise the nuclear pound in our communities, and recognise nuclear as a catalyst for economic development and economic growth. I very much support the Government’s initiatives. Nuclear must not be looked at in isolation but as part of the wider economy, and it therefore needs to work with local enterprise partnerships, councils and, clearly, the private sector.

I have some direct questions for the Minister. Will he confirm his support for NuGen and the development of a new build in Cumbria? Will he indicate when legislation is needed to change the role of the NDA, which should be about development, not just decommissioning. Finally, I thank the Minister for agreeing to come to the Cumbria nuclear conference, and I very much look forward to seeing him there.

Several hon. Members rose—

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Order. I will call the Front Benchers at 10.30 am. A number of Members wish to speak, so if they speak for seven minutes each we should get everyone in.

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, especially since in such debates as this we often refer to developments in your constituency.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing this important debate. We have heard a lot of enthusiasm for new nuclear, but I will change that, because I do not share that enthusiasm. In fact, the Government have many questions to answer on their path towards new nuclear, in particular on new developments.

The disastrous Hinkley Point C project exemplifies the Government’s regressive energy strategy and lack of a long-term plan that could cost taxpayers billions. The project at Wylfa is no different: total project costs are unclear, but have been trailed to be about £20 billion—more expensive than Hinkley’s £19.6 billion—a figure that could rise with inevitable delays. The direct investment represents a reversal of decades of opposition to investing taxpayer money in new nuclear.

The Government must fulfil the Public Accounts Committee’s recommendation of a full value-for-money assessment before signing any deals, and they must consider the National Audit Office’s report on Hinkley Point C. Consumers already face the impact of a bad deal made by the Government. Hinkley Point is set to cost consumers a fortune because of the appalling strike price deal that the UK Government made with EDF. As a result of the bad deal, consumers are set to pay at least £30 billion over the 35-year contract through their electricity bills.

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater and West Somerset) (Con): I apologise for being late, Mr Owen. I had a supply chain meeting.

I invite the hon. Gentleman to come to Hinkley C—I mean that sincerely. I will host him and I will show him around the site and what is going on at Hinkley C so that he can see on the ground what is happening there and at the National College for Nuclear. I think that it would give him a new perspective on the situation.

Drew Hendry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for the invitation to Hinkley Point C, but seeing the construction and the rest of the work, however good the quality, would not change the fact that the deal is disastrous for the taxpayer. It is also unlikely to get any better, because we face paying for another failing nuclear project.

The strike price for the new project has been trailed at £77.50 per megawatt-hour, which is down from Hinkley Point’s £92.50 through UK Government support for capital costs. That figure, however, is still significantly more than for offshore wind at £57.50 per megawatt-hour, even including intermittency costs of about £7 per megawatt-hour. How can the Minister justify that cost to the taxpayer?

My second question concerns financial liability for nuclear power station safety. Liability for nuclear developers is capped at £1.3 billion in the event of a nuclear incident, as agreed in the Brussels and Paris conventions. An event such as the one at Fukushima, however, would cost hundreds of billions of pounds. Moreover, The Times reported that Hitachi “won’t pay” for nuclear accidents at Wylfa and that, according to Nikkei reports, some of Hitachi’s directors want “safeguards that reduce or eliminate Hitachi’s financial responsibility for accidents at the plant”.

[John Stevenson]
Hitachi has already had two serious safety breaches at its nuclear developments, one of which resulted in a £2.7 million fine by the US Government.

Decommissioning costs ate up around half the budget of the now disbanded Department of Energy and Climate Change after the liabilities for cleaning up old nuclear plants were in effect nationalised in 2004 and 2005, when British Nuclear Fuels Ltd and British Energy faced financial problems. At the moment Hinkley C’s decommissioning costs are estimated at between £5.9 billion to £7.2 billion. Dr Paul Dorfman notes that given that decommissioning costs have been consistently underrated, and the precedent set by the Government’s taking ownership of liabilities of these companies more than a decade ago, it is highly likely that the Government will be forced to shoulder further costs if Hinkley developers have a shortfall. Again, will the Minister give an urgent assurance that taxpayers will not be left liable for safety failures at the Wylfa nuclear plant? That is wrong headed, especially for Scotland.

The announcement comes at a time when the prices of offshore wind, other renewables and storage solutions have dropped dramatically. Let us remember that the UK Government made the shameful decision to pull the rug out from under their long-term carbon capture and storage scheme in Peterhead. By cancelling the £1 billion competition just six months before it was due to be awarded, after spending £100 million on it, they broke their own election manifesto promise and left Peterhead—a key candidate for support—behind.

The decision left a huge and damaging legacy to investment incentives and consumer confidence in the UK. Their new idea for carbon capture and storage is not the £1 billion minimum required, but a tenth of that—£100 million—which equals what was already wasted.

While the UK Government continue to fail Scotland’s energy sector, the Scottish Government see carbon capture utilisation and storage—CCUS—as an important decarbonisation infrastructure requirement and essential climate change technology. Scotland remains the best-placed country in Europe to realise CCUS on a commercial scale. That is why the Scottish Government support the Acorn CCS project at St Fergus, which has also secured £1.9 million in funding. The Scottish Government have delivered an exceptional range of support for the oil and gas sector. They have delivered an increase of £270 million to the economy, jobs and a fair work portfolio, including an uplift of more than £194 million in the enterprise and energy budget to support entrepreneurship, construction and productivity. That additional funding contributes to investment of almost £2.4 billion in enterprise and skills through our enterprise agencies and skills bodies.

I could go on and give a lot more detail on the Scottish Government’s support, but I will welcome one thing that the UK Government did recently: introducing the transferable tax histories mechanism in the 2017 Budget. But why has that been deferred by at least a year, when it is a crucial time for industry? That incentive could have been used to realise long-life assets.

The Scottish Government are doing everything they can with a world-leading climate Bill and bold support for renewable energy. The Scottish Government’s forward-looking agenda puts Westminster’s to shame. The UK Government should do more to support oil and gas and far more to support renewables opportunities. They should not make this mistake with nuclear. It is high time that they abandoned their costly love affair with nuclear and instead focused investment that can make a real, positive difference for our environment, jobs and our economy.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Albert Owen (in the Chair):** Order. If remaining Back-Bench Members speak for no longer than six minutes, there should be time for everyone to speak who wishes to.

10.3 am

**Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con):** It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing it. She made many excellent points in welcoming the deal, and I agree that Ministers and industry have taken some positive and necessary steps forward to secure sector jobs and skills, and for our national prosperity.

This is the fifth sector deal under the modern industrial strategy and I hope it will not be the last; as the Minister knows, as an MP representing the potteries I am extremely keen to see a successful sector deal for ceramics. I want to highlight the transferability of skills, knowledge and technology from across the advanced manufacturing industry, which are germane to a civil nuclear sector deal.

I also want to talk about transferability and advances in the military-use nuclear sector, especially those achieved by Goodwin International in my constituency. They have delivered an increase of scale and making nuclear a much more viable solution by Goodwin International in my constituency. That technology from across the advanced manufacturing industry, which are germane to a civil nuclear sector deal.

I am encouraged by the £44 million SMR framework, which the deal promises on page 22, will offer “greater flexibility” in the generic design assessment process. It confirms that the SMR expert finance working group will report to Ministers very soon. We can, and indeed must, be well placed to develop first-of-a-kind small reactor projects. SMRs represent an exciting new technology that opens up more of the industry to partial manufacturing in off-site supply chains. This factory-build production line approach has the potential to reduce significantly the costs of nuclear energy generation, creating economies of scale and making nuclear a much more viable solution to our future energy demands.

It is welcome that the Government intend to pursue the development of credible commercial propositions and the viability of private investment vehicles for clean energy infrastructure projects using advanced nuclear technologies. However, wherever possible and appropriate, any up-front Government guarantees on taking the energy produced by SMR technology would be extremely helpful to de-risk, and thereby leverage, the investment the Government seek from private funds and commercial companies such as Goodwin International. If we have the domestic confidence to develop SMRs, that will lead to wider confidence in the technology, leading to opportunities for the UK to benefit from exports of SMRs to other countries.
The Government are well aware of the crossover potential from military-use nuclear technology. On page 36, the deal talks of “our new Dreadnought submarines” and the fantastic workers at Barrow who are responsible for their assembly. I would not want it to be overlooked that those submarines rely on critical supply chains across the country. Goodwin International is expert in producing the high-end nuclear-grade steel components required. The engines are developed and produced by equally fantastic workers in Stoke-on-Trent. On page 27, in a section dedicated to sector transferability, there is explicit mention of transferable “bespoke programmes that support the transitioning and transfer of capability between civil and defence”.

I await with great interest further details on the pilot scheme on transferable skills between oil and gas, the armed forces and manufacturing, especially as that will be aligned to “regional skills priorities.”

The city of Stoke-on-Trent and our country would benefit greatly from the envisaged career champions and work experience placements, alongside the T-levels programme and apprenticeships of the engineering and manufacturing route. Engaging young people in education and training, so that they get the transferable skills they will need for careers in advanced manufacturing and world-class engineering, is a regional skills priority for us, as is export capability. I welcome the involvement of the Department for International Trade and the export ambition of £2 billion of contracts by 2030. If anything, I hope that target proves to be rather low.

This sector deal is welcome, and so is the fact that it is not an edict from above and that, although it has concrete measures, it is not cast in stone. There is a great opportunity now for the sector and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to keep reaching out and to get the details right, while maintaining certain flexibility in an era of uncertain, rapid technological change. I look forward to engaging with the Government to realise the benefits for my constituents of the frameworks, pilot projects and partnership building that will advance the deal further as lessons are learned.

John Stevenson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is important to have joined-up thinking within Government in this area? Yes, this is the nuclear sector deal, but it goes beyond nuclear. We need to get the Department for Transport, the Treasury and BEIS involved, so that we address issues such as the A595, which he rightly points out is badly in need of improvement.

John Woodcock: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I thank him for his continued support on the campaign to get the A595 to work. The Department for Education needs to be part of that joined-up thinking, because one of our other big challenges—the deal touches on this, but it is felt particularly acutely in south and west Cumbria—is raising our school standards. We have some of the most advanced jobs it is possible to have, certainly in the large-scale manufacturing projects in Barrow shipyard, yet we have school leavers with lower than average numeracy and literacy. That cannot be right, and we all need to work together to raise those standards, so that the workers we will need in future are capable of doing the tasks we need them to do from the moment they leave school.

Finally, the Minister needs to answer vital questions about the future of the Moorside development in west Cumbria. It would be unconscionable if that development did not go ahead. What the hon. Member for Copeland said about the regulated asset base is absolutely right, but this is a perilous moment for the NuGen deal. We need to hear from the Government that they will stand by the development come what may, be it with a regulated asset base or something else, and that they will not allow Moorside to stall, given the many thousands of jobs and the energy security it would bring, which are crucial to the nation. The Minister can give that message today, and we in Cumbria need to hear it.

Chris Green (Bolton West) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and to follow the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock), who highlighted many important areas. He focused especially on jobs. We ought to have a good distribution of quality, secure jobs right across the country, and the energy sector in the north-west of
England is vital for providing such jobs. I appreciated that on my numerous visits to the Copeland constituency during the by-election campaign—a fourth reason to visit Cumbria. The importance to the local economy of the nuclear sector jobs at Sellafield and elsewhere ought to be recognised. The high-skilled, stable, long-term jobs that the nuclear industry provides are vital not just to people in Cumbria but to many of my constituents, because Cheshire and Warrington are another centre—albeit a very different one—for the nuclear industry.

The focus on nuclear is increasing because demand for electricity will increase in the years ahead, for a variety of reasons. There is also a focus on carbon-free energy production, for a range of good reasons, including the need to control carbon emissions due to concerns about climate change, and concerns about where our oil and gas come from. There are certain parts of the world that we would rather not be dependent on for our energy—we have only to look at the problems Russia caused a few years ago by shutting down gas supplies to eastern Europe. To have security and independence of supply would hugely benefit the country. That is a reason for going nuclear.

We also need to look at our base-load supply. At certain times, such as the middle of winter and at night, solar panels and wind turbines do not provide much energy. There is a significant focus on those technologies, but we do not have the ability to store energy if we over-produce at certain times of the year, week or day. We must therefore ensure that we have a base-load supply. If that is not going to be carbon, we must look to nuclear.

On increased demand for electricity, the Secretary of State for Transport recently made a positive announcement about the next development in our focus on electric vehicles. If we are going to have more electric vehicles—whether they are charged at home, at businesses or in other places around the country—we need to look at power sources to ensure that they can be charged rapidly. We need to look not just at the production of energy, but at its distribution. I would welcome the Minister’s comments about the distribution of energy as we move into an era of more electric vehicles and other demands on the energy sector. Jobs are a key part of that, and whether we go for small modular reactors or full-scale nuclear power stations, we ultimately need cheap, affordable energy for our consumers and businesses.

10.18 am

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) for introducing the debate.

In the words of Lord Hutton of Furness, co-chairman of the Nuclear Industry Council, the UK’s civil nuclear sector “is amongst the most advanced in the world. Our global leadership status has been earned through a record across the entire nuclear lifecycle—from enrichment, through fuel production, generation, operation, new build, research and decommissioning—and increasingly enhanced by our world class regulatory system as the country’s new build programme takes shape.”

Hartlepool is part of that success story. Hartlepool power station, as part of the fleet of nuclear power stations that provides more than 20% of the UK’s electricity supply, has provided a low-carbon, reliable, clean energy product since 1983 and is a major provider of employment in the town.

The advanced gas-cooled reactor at Hartlepool currently provides electricity for more than 3% of the UK, with a net electrical output of 1,190 MW—enough to power 1.5 million homes. However, it is coming to the end of its life cycle, so I have written to the Secretary of State seeking support for Hartlepool as a site on which to develop new nuclear productivity around small modular reactor technology.

Hartlepool has the relevant licences, a skilled workforce, existing electricity transmission infrastructure and, more importantly, a community used to the presence of a nuclear generator. We are best placed to deliver the next generation of nuclear and meet the ambitions of the nuclear sector deal. The deal sets out pledges from both the Government and the nuclear industry for making cost reductions and initiatives to support the sector. SMRs are central to that vision, as they meet the increased demand for low-carbon solutions, produce clean, affordable energy and are much smaller than traditional nuclear reactors. Over their life cycle they could deliver £62 billion for the economy and create up to 40,000 jobs.

In an area where new energy solutions such as carbon capture and storage are being explored and developed through new technologies and industries, Hartlepool is in a prime situation to take our nuclear capability to the next level. That is why it is important that we are identified as a future site for SMRs as soon as possible. We have the potential and shared vision to develop the next generation of nuclear power and foster innovation and new technologies, and we are ready and willing to deliver this exciting agenda.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): Because of the discipline of Back Benchers and the concise way in which they gave speeches, I can call the Front Benchers early. I ask them to leave some time for the sponsor of the debate to say a few words at the end.

10.22 am

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I am sure it is your stewardship that has allowed the debate to progress so well. You sit through many debates in Westminster Hall and will have seen how they often have a unifying effect, with everyone saying roughly the same thing and agreeing on the argument, so I am sure as Chair you will welcome there being two sides to the argument on the nuclear sector deal. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) for providing the counter-arguments.

I commend the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) for securing the debate. I note that she thanked all Members for contributing at the start and end of her speech, but I wonder whether that will hold true for the contributions from my party.

I talked about there being a unifying effect, and there is no doubt that Labour and the Conservatives are singing from the same hymn sheet. In that, from our perspective there is a wee bit of a throwback to Better Together. That, again, is why I am delighted to put forward a different argument.

The hon. Member for Copeland rightly spoke about jobs and skills. I appreciate that highly skilled people work in the industry, and I commend her and all the other constituency MPs for arguing for the value of the
jobs brought to their constituencies. It is only right that MPs should fight for jobs in their constituencies, but other people in Parliament have to look at the bigger picture, not just the narrow, localised effect. She spoke about her family history and involvement in the nuclear industry. In fact, my brother-in-law works at a nuclear site in Hunterston in Ayrshire. Again, I appreciate the high level of skills and value of the jobs, but that does not change my outlook on nuclear.

The hon. Lady spoke about the opening of a power station in 1956. I had a shudder, because I thought she had said 1966—it must be World cup fever—so I had to look it up, and I am glad it was not that year. She mentioned Glasgow University, where I did civil engineering. She also mentioned cosmic particles, which is when it starts to go above my pay grade and understanding as a civil engineer. That does illustrate the multitude of skills involved in the nuclear industry.

The hon. Lady spoke about new ways to finance nuclear energy. I suggest that they are just another way of UK plc being completely indebted currently and for future generations. She mentioned that 100,000 workers would be required by 2021, which for me was a sobering statistic. That is not far away, and if 100,000 skilled workers are required by then the Government are already way behind the curve on science, technology, engineering and maths, on university qualifications and on generating workers. Yet again, that illustrates the impact of Brexit, trying to control borders and not letting people in. There will be a massive shortfall, because there is no way to create 100,000 new workers by 2021.

Trudy Harrison: It is actually only an extra 13,000 workers. We currently have 87,000 workers in the UK and it will be taken up to 100,000 by 2021.

Alan Brown: I thank the hon. Lady for correcting the record. However, even 13,000 jobs by 2021 is still a big ask and a massive challenge for the Government.

The hon. Lady also mentioned the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and how it should be renamed the nuclear development authority—a sleight of hand picked up by other hon. Members. The NDA is responsible for massive expenditure on the historical legacy and historical folly of past investment in the nuclear industry. We should not look at it as a development opportunity. We should show it for what it is, liable for cleaning up the mess of past investment.

I would suggest the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) went slightly off topic and concentrated on the military, which is understandable, given his constituency interests. He did not say how the new nuclear submarines and Trident replacement will cost £200 billion, which is another nuclear folly investment that we could do without. I completely agree. That is another mistake that Governments of different colours have made. It is time the Government took action to address that, rather than having subs rusting away.

The hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) spoke of how Cumbria manages to juggle tourism and the nuclear industry—both civil and military. That pays testament to the beauty of Cumbria and his constituency in being able to do that. He also spoke about a change of role for the NDA, which I have already said I do not agree with.

I agree with everything said by my hon. Friend the Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey—who would have thought? When he sat down, he joked about being popular. We saw hon. Members starting to look away or tune out because they did not agree with him, but I certainly do. My hon. Friend was right to highlight the potential £20 billion of Wylfa investment, the Public Accounts Committee’s recommendations and the bad deal that is Hinkley. He correctly highlighted—let us not shy from this—that the contract for difference strike rate for offshore wind is now £57.50 per MWh, including intermittent costs. That, Mr Owen, is for only 15 years; Hinkley, at £92.50 per MWh, is a 35-year deal, so it is even more than what we are sometimes led to believe. My hon. Friend correctly highlighted Hitachi’s past failures and fines, and the decommissioning costs of Hinkley, and I will make further comments about that.

The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent South (Jack Brereton) spoke about the £44 million package for small modular reactors. I admire his optimism, but I suggest it is a bit naive. This unproven technology still needs to be developed, and let us not be kidded that the Government will enter into another blank cheque agreement to supply the SMRs.

The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) spoke about the world-class skills at Sellafield, and I agree with him. However, some of those world-class skills are due to the £91 billion cost of decommissioning at Sellafield—there is a legacy for the nuclear industry to be proud of. It is estimated that those decommissioning costs will be £121 billion by 2020, which again illustrates the folly of it all. The hon. Gentleman also mentioned baseload, but even National Grid now says that baseload is an outdated concept based on past assumptions.

The hon. Member for Bolton West (Chris Green) says that we should not rely on foreign countries for our energy supply, but let me ask him who is involved in Hinkley—I am pretty sure that China is classed as a foreign country, although perhaps not one we want to rely on for the security of our energy supply.

The hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) spoke about small modular reactors, and he also mentioned carbon capture and storage—I would certainly welcome the development of CCS in his constituency and the wider Teesside area.

Hinkley was the Prime Minister’s first U-turn. When she came to power she hit pause on Hinkley Point C, which I welcomed. I thought, “Here we go. Let’s have a fresh look at this and scrap the project”, but no, there was another U-turn, and the strong and stable Prime Minister showed her will and backbone, caved in and threw money at foreign countries to allow Hinkley to go ahead.

The nuclear sector deal, at £200 million as well as the £32 million kick-start for research and development, is like all beer in terms of Government expenditure. Hon. Members have said how good that funding is, but it is really just a signal of intent, rather than absolute hard cash. Indeed, compare that funding with...
the £586 million in sunk costs of three major contracts that have been cancelled at Sellafield since 2012, because the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority found more cost-effective strategies. The real hidden cost of nuclear power is the cost of decommissioning.

A National Audit Office report states that the cost of decommissioning will be £121 billion, and £6 billion is the total expected spend on major projects that are currently in design or under construction at Sellafield. Sellafield Ltd’s spend on major projects in 2017-18 was £483 million. I understand why constituency MPs welcome that spend and the jobs in their constituencies, but taxpayers across the UK are picking up the bill to support those local jobs, and we need to take a closer look at the issue. I will conclude my remarks by urging the Government to end the folly of their nuclear obsession, start reinvesting in renewables, and allow onshore wind and solar to bid for future contract for difference options.

That is the future, not nuclear.

10.33 am

Dr Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): This morning I will concentrate on the debate initiated by the hon. Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison), which is on the nuclear sector deal, following the publication of the industrial strategy, before making a few other remarks. I congratulate her on securing this debate. She provides an example of one of the pillars of the industrial strategy, which is about place, and during her time in the House she has been a superb advocate for her place in the country in relation to nuclear programmes. Indeed, I served with her on the Nuclear Safeguards Bill Committee, and I learned a lot about the nuclear industry and its associated activities as a result of serving on that Committee and hearing her important interventions.

In her remarks the hon. Lady put the issues in this sector deal squarely on the table. It is good that we have an industrial strategy in the first place. For many years there was no such thing as an industrial strategy in Government—indeed, the Government said that having such a strategy would be a bad idea. Having an industrial strategy and a plan, followed by sector deals, is a considerable advance towards ensuring that industries and centres of industry get collective support among themselves by using their own skills and arrangements, as well as Government support to take that forward. This sector deal has been brought forward very much as a collaborative process. The Nuclear Industry Council and the Nuclear Industry Association produced an early prototype of this sector deal to bring to the Government, and the current deal shows clear signs of that collaboration.

What should we draw attention to in the sector deal? The first thing is the extent to which it highlights our skills and strengths in particular areas of our nuclear industry. As the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) said, one of those strengths is the world-beating concentration of decommissioning, research and development, and nuclear development facilities that exist in and around Sellafield and in Cumbria generally. It seems right that the sector deal should seek to strengthen and extend the work of that centre in the UK because—as hon. Members have mentioned—of the possibilities that exist for substantial world contracts, the export of skills, knowledge and knowhow, practical assistance in nuclear decommissioning, and the many other associated activities that can, do, and will stem from that part of the country. I commend the hon. Gentleman’s suggestion that the collaboration between military nuclear and civil nuclear should be extended because, among other reasons, of the crossover of skills and technologies that can result from such collaboration.

Some hon. Members might have thought that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) made a slight diversion from our discussion this morning, and I have discussed with him for a long time the question of what to do about decommissioning nuclear submarines. That decommissioning effectively comes under a programme in the Ministry of Defence but, as my hon. Friend said, such a programme does not exist in reality. Yet if we were to join together that decommissioning with our decommissioning in Sellafield, using the skills there, we could make enormous progress on something that, as my hon. Friend mentioned, is a dreadful blot on our national landscape—it can be seen on Google. It needs to be dealt with urgently and Sellafield is the place to do it. We should ensure we do that in the not-too-distant future. I should like that included specifically in the sector deal. Perhaps when we get to version 1.2 that will happen. By the way, another enormous centre of nuclear excellence is the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy. I should mention the sector deal funding for it and the Government’s support for nuclear fusion and the work there.

Inevitably, documents have strengths and weaknesses. The weakness of the sector deal document is two-fold. Perhaps the first part of that is not a weakness but a recognition of what needs to be done in the nuclear sector in the next period. I note from the executive summary that there is to be, by agreement, “a 30% reduction in the cost of new build projects by 2030” and “savings of 20% in the cost of decommissioning compared with current estimates by 2030”.

That reflects the fact that as things stand a lot of nuclear activity is just too expensive. Hon. Members have mentioned that the costs of new nuclear build and perhaps the process of bringing new builds into operation are still apparently far too high. Indeed, the national infrastructure assessment for 2018 has recently come out, and it suggests that only one new nuclear build should be signed up to before 2025, because of its analysis of the current relative costs of new nuclear and new renewables. It also suggests that, even with arrangements such as the regulated asset base that the Government are looking at in relation to new nuclear build, costs would be transferred rather than reduced. Certainly if that arrangement meant that consumers bore the same costs, but in advance of the plants coming into operation, which appears to be one mechanism of the regulated asset base arrangement, it would be an evasion of the task ahead, rather than implementation. It seems to me that the commitment in the nuclear sector deal to bring those costs down is important, and that it is an essential element of the way nuclear build would compete in the future with other forms of energy production. That is an important component of the nuclear sector deal.

Finally, I want briefly to draw attention to the advanced nuclear reactors that have been discussed here this morning—small modular nuclear reactors. There is a cost element problem attached to them, too, but they
have substantial advocates, for a variety of reasons. There is a suggestion that their modular nature could bring down costs considerably. The document includes a commitment to £44 million, as the hon. Member for Copeland and others have mentioned, to underpin developments on small modular nuclear reactors. That is a bit of a surprise to me, as I recall hearing a suggestion in the 2016 Budget that there should be £250 million of support for them and, indeed, a competition to sort out the best designs. I also recall that in the following two years I did not hear any news about the competition or its outcomes, or about the expenditure of the £250 million, other than a statement by the Minister at the end of 2017 that there might be up to £100 million, not for a competition but for the development of small modular nuclear reactors. As it turned out, the Minister then made a statement that £56 million would be available.

Now, in the nuclear sector deal, the figure is £44 million. That is not to my mind exactly a great deal, from the Government end, for small modular nuclear reactors in the future, bearing in mind what was previously promised and what is in place now. I wonder if the Minister would comment on whether that is because of efficiency gains or the allocation of the money for other purposes—or perhaps because the Government are simply cooling towards the idea of supporting small modular nuclear reactors and have put a reduced sum in the nuclear sector deal. Whatever the reason, Government support for a promising and interesting development seems to have been substantially downgraded. What are the Minister’s thoughts on the appropriateness of that, and might he have further thoughts on how the support could be better deployed in future, on new deals?

10.48 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Richard Harrington): It is a pleasure, as always, Mr Owen, to speak under your chairmanship. I would very much like to answer the shadow Minister’s points, but I am very short of time. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Trudy Harrison) on securing the debate. In fact, on a recent visit to Sellafield she knew so many people that I thought there should be a big sign in the street saying “There’s oodles of Troodles”—because she is omnipresent. She personifies the way the Government support the nuclear sector. I must disagree with the two Scottish National party speeches; there is a fundamental difference of opinion there. We believe that nuclear is an important part of the mix for this country. We do not agree that it is incompatible with building up renewables. Security of supply is the most important thing. One of our strengths is the balance that we have. I know that will continue.

[Interruption.]

I do not really have time to give way. I have to get on, or I cannot answer hon. Members’ questions. The Government are committed to those strengths. We must develop the technologies that will transform existing industries; that is part of our industrial strategy and the nuclear sector deal is an important part of that.

I must apologise to the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (John Woodcock) for not being at his urgent question, but when I heard about it I was on a train from Chester to north Wales to help launch the nuclear sector deal. However, had he informed me the night before, it would of course have been my pleasure to be there. I will come on to his points in a moment.

The sector deal was launched in Truwsfynydd in north Wales, which is a fitting setting for it. It is a £200 million package with a focus on innovation, cost reduction and skills, to ensure we have the technology and expertise necessary to maintain the UK’s position as one of the world’s leaders in the nuclear sector. I congratulate Lord Hutton, the sector champion; we worked with him and with industry leads from the Nuclear Industry Council to develop the content of the deal. The basic points are, first, a 30% cost reduction in the cost of new build projects. As the shadow Minister said, it is essential for the future that the cost of nuclear comes down.

The cost of Hinkley Point was mentioned in the contributions from the Scottish National party; that was done in such a way that there is no risk to the taxpayer but huge benefits to this country. On a recent visit to Hinkley Point, I was very well hosted by the local MP, my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater and West Somerset (Mr Liddell-Grainger), and I recommend that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) takes him up on his invitation. It is an incredible site and so good for this country, with local contractors and British companies employing so many people.

The second point is to achieve savings of 20% in the cost of decommissioning compared with current estimates, and the third is hugely to increase the number of women. I was impressed by the number of women working on the site in Hinkley, particularly the apprentices.

I must rush. The hon. Member for Barrow and Furness asked me to answer a question about the transport link points and said, quite rightly, that my Department must work closely with the Department for Transport. I know that that is happening and that there is a joint committee, but, as a result of his point, I will attend the next meeting of the joint committee and personally report back to the hon. Gentleman—either by writing to him or by arranging to meet him on that subject.

NuGen Moorside, which the hon. Member for Carlisle (John Stevenson) mentioned, is a commercial matter between companies at the moment. The Government do not have a magic answer to that, but my hon. Friend asked me to state that we stand by to provide whatever assistance is needed, and we have shown in Wylfa, Anglesey, in which you may have an interest, Mr Owen—although I know you are interested in everything that goes on while you are in the Chair—that we will look at innovative methods of funding new nuclear developments. I understand that there are commercial negotiations going on in places such as Japan and South Korea, and we are monitoring the situation. Again, I will happily report to my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for Barrow and Furness what comes from it.

The hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) brought up some interesting points, which I must say I was completely ignorant of, about the nuclear submarines in Devonport. I have not looked on Google Earth, because I thought that would be a bit rude under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, but I will do so straight afterwards. I know there is a joint review between the Ministry of Defence and ourselves on
decommissioning, and there is a lot of work to be done, but I want to include the MOD more in everything we do. It is quite time enough, and the hon. Gentleman made a very good point, supported by some of my hon. Friends. Because the MOD is a member of the Nuclear Industry Council, it is time that that artificial distinction came to an end, and I will do my absolute best to bring that about.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle and other speakers brought up points about the RAB system of funding, at which we are looking closely. There is a lot of work going on about that. Obviously, I cannot make an announcement on it because we have not yet reached that stage, but it is an innovative form of funding. It gives certainty; it has worked for the Thames tideway and is being looked at for other schemes, and I hope to report back on developments there.

The main point of the whole sector deal that I can see, which is one of the first things that I really got involved in when I took on this portfolio and which I am impressed by, is the contributions from industry and how many different companies are involved. It is not just the usual suspects, or two or three people; it is very comprehensive.

On decommissioning, I have been asked by several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Copeland, about the role of the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority as time goes on and moving it from decommissioning to development. Its interest now is in decommissioning; it is the decommissioning authority, and we know that that is overwhelmingly its most significant purpose. However, on a visit to Sellafield, where I met and was impressed by their management, I was told that they already do about £100 million worth of export services. We are well respected throughout the world, and I think it will develop exactly in the way that my hon. Friend suggested, towards a development agency. Part of the sector deal is to transform decommissioning from where it is now, which certainly on the face of it is just a burden to the taxpayer, to an industry that employs a lot of people and supports a lot of products for this country and will be the foremost of its nature in the world. The set-up is now there to achieve that.

I will finish my comments now, Mr Owen, because you have asked me to leave time for my hon. Friend to make a few winding-up comments. I thank everybody; I am sorry I have not had time to go into more detail on some points, but I am always available to talk about them with any hon. Member here.

10.56 am

Trudy Harrison: I thank the Minister for his comments, which were both reassuring and helpful for all of us who speak positively about the nuclear industry. I will come on to the comments by my SNP colleagues, because I welcome them and the challenge of the hon. Members for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown). There was quite a lot that I agreed with. I agree that we need to bring down the cost of new nuclear and also that we need to ensure that the decommissioning skills do not just take from the taxpayer but generate more. We can do that through exporting those skills, as I said in my comments.

I also agree that this is part of an energy mix. In my constituency, we have skilled engineers with transferable skills now working in the renewables sector in their spare time, because in a place such as Cumbria or, indeed, Scotland we should not face fuel poverty; we should transform it to fuel prosperity. I want to see more local communities use natural resources, whether that be wave and hydro power, biomass and anaerobic digestion, geothermal or solar. I want to see those technologies harnessed in our local communities.

However, I will just draw attention to one point: last Saturday, wind energy generated just 3.4% of the energy power requirement. I am sure we all remember that last Saturday was a critical day. If the TVs had gone off last Saturday it would have meant catastrophe for England—perhaps not so important for Scotland, but I would like to think there was support there.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions. I have found the debate helpful and I feel there is much more scope for us to work cross-party for the benefit of nuclear civil and nuclear defence, right through from research and development, SMR, advanced modular reactors, large-scale reactors and operations to decommissioning and export, to ensure that we have the skills for the future, to galvanise the nuclear industry and to secure our place once again as global leaders.

Question put and agreed to.
Resolved,
That this House has considered the nuclear sector deal.
In 2016, the ice bucket challenge became a viral sensation, with many celebrities, sports stars and even politicians throwing ice-cold water over themselves to raise awareness of MND. It was a global campaign and raised in excess of $100 million for support and research into the causes of, and potential cures for, MND. It was so successful that the additional funding helped scientists at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in the United States to uncover a new gene that they believe may well be the cause of MND. Although we are still far from a cure, we are—hopefully—getting closer.
When applying for ESA, claimants must undergo a work capability assessment, which is used to determine which tier claimants are streamed into. Reassessments are common, to ensure that people are correctly tiered. The maximum amount of time between reassessments is two years.

Scott Mann (North Cornwall) (Con): A concern of my constituents is the challenges of the benefits system for people with this illness, and how that snowballs and affects their lives. Most people receive the correct financial support after their assessment. However, there are people with this long-term condition, which will not improve. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, once somebody with MND has been assessed, they should not be continually reassessed to see whether their condition will improve in the future?

Stephen Twigg: I agree entirely. In fact, he anticipates what I am about to say. It is excellent that the debate has cross-party support from Back-Bench Members, so I am grateful for that intervention. Reassessments are my point of grievance with the Government.

Last September, the Department announced that new claimants with the most severe disabilities who apply for ESA will be exempt from reassessment. That is because, as the hon. Gentleman just said, many people with the most severe disabilities have little to no chance of their condition improving. The announcement was, of course, hugely welcome. However, the exemption applies to new claimants, not to those people with long-term conditions who were already in the support group before September 2017.

People with MND—of course, this also applies to other conditions, but today’s focus is on motor neurone disease—who were already in the support group last September are required to undergo a final assessment in order to be exempt. The Government have provided assurances that the final assessment for people with MND will be mostly paper-based, but that is not guaranteed, and the paper-based system is itself not straightforward. It requires filling out a complicated 26-page form. Having to complete such a form is surely an unnecessary further stress for people living with MND. Complications or issues with the paper assessment could mean that claimants are required to attend another face-to-face assessment.

If a claimant has received a confirmed diagnosis of MND or another permanent condition that holds no prospect of recovery and they are already in the support group, there is surely no point in subjecting them to a final assessment. The nature of the claimant’s condition means that another assessment is redundant. It not only causes the claimant further stress and anxiety, but wastes public money on a needless reassessment. People with MND who are in the support group will already have undergone at least one assessment of their ability to work. Given the progressively debilitating nature of MND, their symptoms will almost certainly have got worse since that assessment.

In February, representatives of the Motor Neurone Disease Association met the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, at the Department to discuss this specific issue. They took with them an open letter, signed by more than 8,000 people, which called on the Government to end mandatory reassessments for claimants with MND. My understanding is that the Minister committed to finding a solution that would exempt people with MND from reassessments, but she said that that would not happen until a review of the Government’s entire exemption policy had taken place. The Minister sent a letter to the MNDA following that meeting. It is welcome that the Minister has discussed a possible solution to this matter with her officials. However, the lack of reference to an imminent solution for those already in the support group is worrying and is causing further anxiety.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the reassessment issue underlines the fact that, despite the improved understanding and awareness of motor neurone disease as a condition, there seems to be a lack of understanding in the DWP, not just of motor neurone disease, but of declining, terminal conditions generally, and that perhaps a better approach is required across the board?

Stephen Twigg: I agree entirely. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to say that what we are discussing affects not only motor neurone disease, but a number of other conditions. I will not take any further interventions, because I want to leave the Minister enough time to respond in this short debate.

The Government have yet to give a timeframe for a review of exemptions to take place. Until that review is complete, people with MND still risk being called for an unnecessary and wasteful reassessment at any point. Even worse, should the claimant be unable to complete the reassessment, their benefits could be taken away from them. That would be cruel and totally unacceptable.

My understanding—we will hear the Minister’s response in a moment—is that the system that the Department uses for ESA claimants is not able to differentiate between different diagnoses, so it is not possible for the Department to filter all the people in the support group who have MND or similar conditions in order to grant them an exemption from further assessment. Can the Minister shed some light on why the system has been set up in that way, and what changes the Department could make to prevent such issues from occurring again? I do not think that it would be unreasonable for the Department to apply an automatic exemption to all those claimants currently in the support group who have a certified MND diagnosis; and that should not require an additional face-to-face assessment, as there is no prospect of people with MND getting better.

Last month, the Department changed the personal independence payment system so that those with severe degenerative diseases will no longer have to undergo regular tests to prove that they remain eligible for PIP. That exemption includes people with MND as well as other conditions, such as Parkinson’s and multiple sclerosis. In practice, that means that people whose condition is unchanging and degenerative can be awarded the highest PIP amount, with only a light-touch reassessment once a decade.

I would like the Government to adopt a similar mechanism whereby people with MND can avoid an unnecessary and wasteful reassessment at any point. That would be cruel and totally unacceptable. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that what we are discussing affects not only motor neurone disease, but a number of other conditions. I will not take any further interventions, because I want to leave the Minister enough time to respond in this short debate.

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could then use that information to move the claimant to a long-term award within the support group, which would protect them from the need for any further reassessment. The Government have cited legal and operational issues that apparently prevent that seemingly straightforward and humane system from becoming the norm. The DWP has accepted that the work capability assessment is a demanding experience, especially for those with long-term or degenerative conditions, yet it still argues that it is the best method of assessing the suitability to work of those with life-limiting conditions.

As I said, the Government have already changed their policy on new employment and support allowance claimants and their policy with regard to personal independence payment. Today’s debate provides an opportunity for the Minister, who is back in the Department, to say that it will make a similar change for this crucial group of existing ESA recipients. People living with motor neurone disease face many challenges in their lives. Removing the threat of an ESA reassessment would make a real difference to the lives of hundreds of people and their families. I urge the Minister to look again at this issue, and to do so as a matter of urgency.

Albert Owen (in the Chair): In calling the Minister to respond to the debate, I welcome him to his place.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Thank you, Mr Owen. It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, although this has perhaps not quite been the week I was expecting.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg), who has been a tireless campaigner on this issue both in his constituency, where he has the honour of being the patron of the local branch of the MND Association, and in his work through the APPG. Over the years, he has been a really strong advocate in an area in which there is a lot of cross-party support for improvement. As a Government, we are very much listening, but I will come on to those points.

I also welcome the members of the audience, whom I briefly met outside the Chamber and who have been supporting this work and showcasing the real difference that is needed right across the system. In particular, I pay tribute to Sandra Smith, who has supported the work of the hon. Gentleman. My hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work is currently undergoing a grilling by the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. I was meant to be part of that Select Committee and asking questions, so we have done a bit of a swap-over. I spoke to her at length last night, and she is incredibly passionate about this work. She is meeting the APPG next Thursday, with representatives of the national association. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to join that meeting.

Nationally, the MNDA is one of the most proactive and constructive organisations for engaging with MPs of all backgrounds and across the parties and working with the Government. At the heart of many of the improvements delivered since 2010 has been the MNDA, using the real-life experiences of its members to make a real difference. There are 90 volunteer branches across the country and 3,000 volunteers. We can all lobby today, and I would like to lobby the MNDA to recognise how fantastic Heather Smith of the Swindon and Wiltshire branch is. She regularly comes to different events in my office, and I think that she should be part of the association’s head office. There we go—even a Minister can lobby.

I want to acknowledge the seriousness of motor neurone disease. While it is thankfully uncommon, it is disabling and distressing. The outlook for those diagnosed is poor, with life-expectancy significantly reduced for the vast majority. Those who are diagnosed with the condition will inevitably need significant medical support as their health deteriorates, with mobility, breathing and eating becoming progressively more difficult.

Crucially—I have seen this in the meetings I have had—we cannot underestimate the emotional and physical impact that motor neurone disease has on the families and friends of those who live with this condition, and who provide care and support 24/7 to their loved ones. They deserve our thanks and appreciation. I know, having met those carers, just how hard that is. That is one of the reasons that there is universal support for this across the House. We all know that this is something we have to take very seriously.

Since 2010, we have been listening and working constructively together across parties. We have made a number of improvements. In October 2016, it was announced that we would stop requiring people with the most severe life-long conditions to be repeatedly assessed for ESA and UC. We all welcomed that; it was a common-sense announcement. We have been working with external stakeholders and healthcare professionals to devise a new set of criteria, to switch off the reassessments for people with the most severe health conditions or disabilities. Those criteria were introduced on 29 September 2017. The MNDA was and will continue to be part of that process. The hon. Gentleman welcomed that in his speech.

That means that for those placed in the ESA support group and the UC equivalent who have the most severe and life-long health conditions or disabilities, whose level of function will always mean that they will have limited capability for work and work-related activity, and who are unlikely to ever be able to move into work, there will no longer be a routine reassessment. That is absolutely key.

We fully appreciate that some people find the work capability assessment a disruptive experience, so we have designed new guidance for healthcare professionals to ensure that the process of initially claiming or going through a reassessment is as unobtrusive as it can be. We ask claimants to complete an ESA50 or UC50 health questionnaire and provide supporting evidence. Where appropriate, we ask their GP or specialist healthcare professional for further supporting evidence. That means that in the vast majority of cases, where the severe conditions criteria would apply, we expect to be able to make a decision on the written evidence alone, without the need to undertake a face-to-face assessment, thereby reducing pressure on the individual.

We will help gather that evidence. We understand that people will be negotiating challenges at home. We will make contact with GPs and health professionals to help gather that. There has been additional training and the
One specific question was why not make things condition-specific. I understand that question and I have raised it myself, but not everybody fits neatly into a box with one condition only. The way health deteriorates can be different from one person to the next. Many people can have multiple conditions. That makes it very complicated. We learnt from legacy benefits that, while initially attractive—I absolutely get it—a one-size-fits-all approach too often means that people cannot access the highest rate when they are initially assessed, because it could be early in that journey of deterioration. The reassessments are often triggered automatically, to ensure they are upgraded to the highest level. We want the people who need the support to get the support. They should not be denied that. On the old legacy benefits, people were left on the lower rates, because they had too many challenges in their own lives to put it in their calendar and say, “I must go and do that.” When we get to that point, we have to make it as light touch and common sense as possible. That is why, if we can get the evidence from the GP and healthcare professional, it can be light touch, to ensure that they access the highest rate of benefit to support them as quickly as possible.

Stephen Twigg: I am listening carefully to the Minister. On condition-specific assessment, surely that is what the Government have done—I welcomed it—for those who are newly assessed for ESA. If it can be done for those who are newly assessed, why can it not be done for those who need a reassessment?

Justin Tomlinson: For those in the system, we already have all the evidence we need. We can, therefore, conduct the light-touch assessment internally. For those people on the legacy, however, that would not necessarily have been the case. That is why we would then need to get the final piece of the jigsaw, in terms of the GP and healthcare professional. The expectation is that this should be done through the written evidence provided. As I said, we will help gather that evidence, but we must ensure that everybody—whether they have MND or any other condition—who should be getting the maximum amount of support can do so as quickly as possible.

Stephen Twigg: The Minister said “expectation”. I encourage the Department to go beyond expectation and make that the policy, as the Motor Neurone Disease Association is saying: if there is a letter from the doctor, that is enough and there is no need for further reassessment.

Justin Tomlinson: That is the absolute expectation. In next week’s meeting we will look at how this is working in practice, whether there are things we need to listen to and go further on, particularly in the training, with the health professionals and assessors in there, but as we have demonstrated since 2010, there have been significant changes. Since 2010, over 100 recommendations have been made, following the independent reviews published by Professor Malcolm Harrington and Dr Paul Litchfield. That is making the assessment process more robust, reliable and sympathetic—actually understanding the multiple challenges people face. One of the most important improvements has been the speed increase, to ensure that we can get people on to the maximum support at the earliest opportunity, rather than leaving people under the old legacy system, not on the highest level of support, which they should be entitled to, recognising that people have enough challenges at home, so we need a more responsive system.

It is important to reiterate that the current assessment process provides a fast-track service for new claims for anyone with a terminal illness who has less than six months to live. Anyone with motor neurone disease who meets that criterion would be guaranteed entitlement to benefit, with claims dealt with sensitively, without a face-to-face assessment and under a fast-track process.

Liz McInnes (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): I attended the all-party parliamentary group on motor neurone disease this week. There was a doctor there who treats MND patients. He said that it was impossible to put a time limit on how long a person with MND had to live, so the six-month limit makes no sense medically whatsoever.

Justin Tomlinson: This is guided by medical evidence. There is continuing work looking to review this. Health professionals and medical experts helped to shape the definition. I accept that it can be difficult. That is why we continue to work with the MNDA and all the organisations who represent their members, to look at what works. Six months is traditionally what is seen. At that point, when a GP says that they believe—it is not an exact science—that that is the point, the assessment will be fast-tracked within 48 hours.

We recognise that there is more to do. We are committed to assessing people with health conditions and disabilities fairly and accurately, while taking a personalised approach, because not everybody fits neatly into a box. We consulted on the work capability assessment reform in the Green Paper published in October 2016. Although there was widespread support for reform, there was not clear consensus from the stakeholders on how it should work. That comes to the point the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Liz McInnes) just made.

To ensure we get the reform right, we are currently focusing on testing new approaches to build our evidence base. We are also working with external stakeholders to give them the opportunity to inform changes and provide their priorities for future reform. That is exactly why MNDA is encouraged—it is very good at this—to work constructively and proactively with the Government as a whole, and specifically with the Minister, who is passionate about this.

In conclusion, I thank the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby for raising such an important topic. I thank the cross-party MPs for their support. They have taken the time to highlight their own experiences on behalf of their constituents. We recognise that this is incredibly important. It is shaping the work the Government do. As a newly-returned Minister to the DWP, I look forward to supporting future improvements.

Question put and agreed to.

11.29 am

Sitting suspended.
Listed Sporting Events

[MRS MADELEINE MOON in the Chair]

4 pm
Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.13 pm
John Grogan (Keighley) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered listed sporting events.

We are less than three hours away from the big match live and free on ITV: England versus Croatia. The nation’s favourite commercial channel, BAFTA-winning for its sport production, is said to expect up to 30 million people to watch that match tonight. Some superstitious English fans would say that England rarely win on ITV—the statistics over the last 20 years show that they have more often won on the BBC. However, I am glad to say that this jinx was broken just a few days ago when England beat Colombia live and free on ITV, so we are safe under the gaze of Mark Pougatch, who will introduce the programme today, but I think it will go to penalties.

I can remember 1966, although you are far too young, Mrs Moon. We watched it at home. My dad had just got his first job as a headteacher at a primary school and we had moved into a new semi-detached house. I was five, and my grandma and my mum were there. My mum was not a football fan. Both my parents are long since dead, but my mum must have done a deal with my dad, because she wanted to go to the plant shop up the road to get plants for the new house. The match kicked off at 3 o’clock in those days; my dad must have said that at 10 to 5 they would go to the plant shop. But he had not reckoned on extra time, so he had to go. One of my earliest memories at five is insisting that I stayed with grandma to watch that match live and free. I remember my dad came back half an hour later, just in time for that most iconic British sports commentary, when Kenneth Wolstenholme said:

“There are people on the pitch. They think it’s all over”—and then the fourth goal went in and he said the iconic line, “It is now.”

Since that match in 1966, many things have changed about the way that people consume football. Last night, I was at the all-party parliamentary beer group. Next to me were two Ministers of the Crown, who I will not name. I had my mobile phone with me and we watched the last five minutes of the other semi-final behind the menu, which I believe you watched in Brussels, Mrs Moon.

We did what many people do these days: consume the menu, which I believe you watched in Brussels, Mrs Moon. We watched it at home. My dad had just got his first job as a headteacher at a primary school and we had moved into a new semi-detached house. I was five, and my grandma and my mum were there. My mum was not a football fan. Both my parents are long since dead, but my mum must have done a deal with my dad, because she wanted to go to the plant shop up the road to get plants for the new house. The match kicked off at 3 o’clock in those days; my dad must have said that at 10 to 5 they would go to the plant shop. But he had not reckoned on extra time, so he had to go. One of my earliest memories at five is insisting that I stayed with grandma to watch that match live and free. I remember my dad came back half an hour later, just in time for that most iconic British sports commentary, when Kenneth Wolstenholme said:

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Since that match in 1966, many things have changed about the way that people consume football. Last night, I was at the all-party parliamentary beer group. Next to me were two Ministers of the Crown, who I will not name. I had my mobile phone with me and we watched the last five minutes of the other semi-final behind the menu, which I believe you watched in Brussels, Mrs Moon. We did what many people do these days: consume the match on a whole variety of devices. Up to 5 million people watched the last England match on the BBC through those devices.

Many things have changed, but audience sizes have not. It is not just for the England games, but the other games that have been on the BBC: Portugal versus Spain—that tremendous free kick from Ronaldo, watched by 10.4 million people; Argentina versus Nigeria, watched by 9.9 million; Germany versus Mexico, watched by 9.5 million. We enjoy a great world festival in this country.

At times, politicians have considered whether the whole World cup should be so listed, but it is great that we list it all. It means that every little bar and restaurant in the country can show the games live and free. I watched one of the games in Tommy’s Burger Joint in Marylebone, which gave a free beer every time Iceland scored—they did not score many goals in that match. In my constituency, Cougar Park will hold a mass showing for free tonight. There are many venues up and down the country: I will mention one other—Cantinho do Aziz, just near Leeds station, which is a Portuguese café, had been following not just the Portuguese games but all the games.

The tournament is a big boost to our hospitality industry and it is not an accident. It happens because we have the listed events law, which goes back to the 1950s and was updated in the 1990s, not without controversy. The late Lord Howell was particularly active from the Opposition Back Benches in those days, ensuring that the law in the 1990s was rigorous. We made that decision as a nation, but my fear is that if the World cup had been in our country—there was a World cup bid in 2018 under the last Labour Government—not all the matches would have been live and free on free-to-air channels.

The Government at the time were under tremendous pressure from FIFA, as has been documented. They made a promise to FIFA that they would basically get rid of that law if we got the World cup. Perhaps the England matches would still be live and free, and perhaps the final, but most of the matches would have gone to the highest bidder. We would have lost something. FIFA and UEFA do not like that law; they have spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on expensive lawyers to try to get it struck down in our courts, without success. I hope that if the four home nations of Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England think about a bid for the World cup in 2030, the Government and the football bodies will make it clear from the outset that we do not intend to change the law in order to sweeten the pill. FIFA has reformed considerably since 2010; a signal of that reform will be that it respects the laws of countries that aspire to hold the World cup in future and does not put pressure on us to change that law.

That was the first of four points that I want to make. My second point is about which sports should be protected by being listed. That is looked at from time to time. We no longer protect the university boat race in the relevant legislation, for example. There were two reviews under the last Labour Government—the first in the 1990s and the second towards the end of that Government. Let me take a look at a couple of sports that were affected by those reviews.

Cricket is perhaps my favourite sport—Yorkshire cricket in particular. In fact, I forgot to mention that no fewer than seven members of the England football squad at the World cup are from God’s own county. One of the great attractions of the England team is that they represent the whole of England, which comes out in their interviews—but back to cricket. In the late 1990s, the Labour Government decided to take live coverage of test matches off the list. Lord MacLaurin, who then chaired the England and Wales Cricket Board, said, “We’ll always keep some live cricket on free-to-air TV.” Sports fans of any kind will remember the glorious summer of 2005, when England played Australia for the Ashes. About 9 million people watched the final test match at the Oval, where England reclaimed the Ashes. That was the last free live cricket of any substance on our television screens.
It is interesting to look at the figures published by Sport England, which tracked participation in a whole range of sports from 2005 to 2016, when it changed its methodology slightly. There was a spike in participation in cricket immediately after 2005, amid the great enthusiasm for the sport after the Ashes series was shown on Channel 4, but those numbers quickly fell away. Cricket clubs around the country tell us that it is now much harder to muster a team. According to Sport England’s figures, participation decreased by about a third over that decade. Contrast that with the 50% increase in participation in athletics, which is much more commonly available.

Towards the end of the Labour Government, the Davies review suggested putting test cricket back on the list. At the time, a gentleman called Philip French worked as a special adviser to the Labour Secretary of State. The ECB, in its wisdom, lobbied heavily against that proposal, the coalition Government came in, Philip French moved over to work for the ECB and the proposal was never implemented.

However, the ECB’s thinking has changed in the intervening years. I know from talking to ECB officials that what brought it home to them that they had a problem—it brought it home to me, too—was a poll of schoolchildren, who were given a picture of Joe Root, the England cricket captain and perhaps the finest living Yorkshireman, and a picture of a wrestler from the United States. Far more of the children recognised the wrestler than recognised Joe Root. I think at that point the cricket authorities recognised they had a problem. They do not support the re-listing of test cricket, but they have done a deal with the BBC, which means that some cricket—a new Twenty20 tournament, plus highlights of tournaments such as the world cup and test matches—will come back to the BBC. I hope the BBC is able to do for cricket what it did for the FA cup: revive it and really promote it.

Golf is another sport that suffered from coming off free-to-air TV. The only live golf on British free-to-air TV is the final two rounds of the Masters from the United States. The Open championship is now hidden away on subscription TV, and viewing figures have plummeted. Many top golfers warned the governing bodies, including the Royal and Ancient, which struggled for many years to admit women to some of its courses and is not necessarily the most progressive governing body, about that. Justin Rose, who won the Olympics golf tournament, said:

“I think having golf coverage on free channels is important to the growth of the game...You can see it through the massive support Andy Murray receives and that’s largely because Wimbledon is still on the Beeb. It resonates because everyone watches it.”

As I said, golf is suffering and fewer people are participating in it.

This is the fifth debate I have called about this subject in my chequered parliamentary career, which has been a bit on-off. Estelle Morris, a good friend of mine who is now in the Lords, was the Minister who replied to one of those debates. She said:

“Looking back, it is amazing how little the sports and events that one would assume to be the most popular have changed. My hon. Friend”—

that was me—

“mentioned the most popular sports and they are, in the main, the same ones that”
there was no opportunity for a free-to-air channel to bid for the 2024 rights. Discovery might have interesting conversations with Ofcom about that, and I do not think it is a foregone conclusion that Ofcom will approve it.

Why does that matter? In the past three Olympic games, British television viewers and those viewing on other devices have been used to seeing all the sports—any sport they want to watch—on the red button. It has been good for minority sports. I think there will be a backlash against that change, come the next summer Olympics.

This is not the most important issue in the world—many more important things are happening—but sport brings a lot of pleasure to many people. Rich and poor, young and old, sports-lovers and non-sports-lovers have all been able to enjoy not just the England matches but the whole carnival that is the World cup. I, for one, hope that may continue long into the future.

4.30 pm

The Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries (Margot James): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon, I congratulate the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan) on securing the debate and his incredible expertise on the subject. I listened to his speech with great interest. It is a pleasure to talk about this subject on such a day, following England’s incredible win at the weekend, and we will all want to wish the team a lot of luck for tonight.

Sport is one of the few things that has the power to bring the nation together. When the biggest sporting events are on, everything stops and the anticipation builds. For really big events like the one tonight, everyone will be talking about it the next day. Last week, 23.8 million people watched England’s game against Colombia, and 20 million people watched England’s game against Sweden. That is even more than watched the royal wedding, and of course that does not include the many who congregate around a particular viewing point.

It is not just by chance that so many people were able to tune in and see those World cup games. The efforts of past Governments, which the hon. Gentleman took us through, have ensured that key sporting events of national importance are available for all to watch on free-to-air television.

The listed events regime, one of the foundations of our broadcasting system in the UK, sets out to have the best interests of viewers at its heart. Since its creation, it has ensured that everyone can share in major British sporting triumphs. Ten million people saw Kelly Holmes win her historic gold medal in Athens, and 15 million saw Jonny Wilkinson win us the rugby world cup in 2003—I still remember that. Nobody can forget the incredible few weeks that were London 2012. Listed events, and in turn our public service broadcasters, are fundamental to broadcasting in the UK, especially as viewing habits and the media landscape change. Of course, more people—more than 80% of the UK population—are watching online than ever before, and we are increasingly watching television on our phones and laptops at different times of the day. A record number of people streamed the England-Sweden game on BBC iPlayer, and nearly 4 million people watched it solely online.

In a world where people can subscribe to Netflix, Amazon and Sky or Virgin at the same time, it is more important than ever that free-to-air public service broadcasters can make an attractive offer to viewers. There is so much choice that it can be hard to know what to subscribe to and what to dispense with. However, the pull of public service broadcasters is still powerful, with 85% of people watching one of those channels every week. Together, they command a 55% share of all television viewing, independent of sport.

Our public service broadcasters spent £515 million on sport last year,1 delivering just over 3,000 hours of content: only factual programmes have more money invested in them. They contribute a huge amount to grassroots sport, with more than half a billion pounds flowing from broadcasters to national governing bodies, which helps sports to increase their grassroots appeal and gives children the opportunity to try new sports when otherwise they might not have been able to do so.

Understandably, our broadcasters can spend only so much money on buying rights to different sporting events. I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman’s sentiments on golf. My personal opinion is that the British Open is much missed from the BBC, which sadly was not able to acquire the rights. However, if other genres started to suffer because of the amount spent on sport, that would not be fair to those who are not big sports fans. It is a difficult balancing act.

Furthermore, some sporting bodies may believe that they can drive a higher price for their rights by working with pay-TV providers or even internet companies such as Amazon. There is the opportunity for sports not on the list to forge their own path. It is ultimately for the national sporting bodies to decide whether they want to try to maximise their returns or strike a balance with a potentially bigger audience. That was at the root of the cricket issue, on which the hon. Gentleman made a number of good points.

The Government’s position is to not reopen the list of events, which we believe to be working and delivering the best outcomes for the viewing public. However, the hon. Gentleman is right that the Digital Economy Act 2017 enables us to change the criteria that underpin the list. He might wish to give that further consideration.

It is desirable for sports to try their best to maximise their audience and their income. I encourage sporting bodies to do their best to adhere to the voluntary broadcast principles of the Sport and Recreation Alliance, which include trying to ensure that at least highlights are shown on free-to-air television so that, for example, we can still watch golf highlights in that way.

It would be ideal to see all major sporting events on free-to-air television, but to date that has not been possible. We have to strike the right balance, so we keep the list under review. I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the chance to acquaint myself with more of the detail of this important matter.

Question put and agreed to.

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Increasing Choice for Rail Passengers

4.37 pm

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Because of the Division, this debate will last until 5.43 pm.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered increasing choice for rail passengers.

It is a pleasure to have you in charge of our proceedings, Mrs Moon. It seems that almost no one is terribly happy with how our railways are performing at the moment. Not passengers, who have to suffer delayed or cancelled trains when timetables go into meltdown, as they have done repeatedly recently, causing misery for millions. Not the unions, who have been in an on-off dispute on a variety of routes for months. Not the staff, who have to cope with angry passengers every day. Not the rail firms, who have repeatedly handed back expensive franchises to the Government because they cannot make them work, and not rail Ministers, who face continuous incoming flak, from urgent questions in Parliament to critical headlines and irate passengers who lose thousands of man-and-woman hours battling to get to and from work every day.

That is odd, because until recently Britain’s railways were quite a success story; something to be proud of. Since denationalisation, passenger rail journeys have more than doubled, and we have one of the safest railways for passengers of any major network in the EU. What has gone wrong? Why is everybody on all sides unhappy with where we are today? I argue it is because franchising has run its course. It might have worked in the past, but not any more—at least, not well enough. It has become a brittle, inflexible, fiendishly complicated, expensive old thing that causes misery and frustration for millions and which nobody loves.

The root of the problem is that franchises put train firms, rather than passengers, first, because passengers do not have any real choices when things go wrong. Why should we be at the mercy of a single train company when the timetable melts down? If a train is delayed or cancelled, we ought to be able to switch to a different firm’s service that is still running instead; franchising takes away that choice. If we do not like the service the franchise-holding firm provides—tough. Our only choices are to get in the car, which could mean traffic jams and is not very green, get on a bus, which is usually slow, or just lump it and get back on the train.

It is weird, really. We would not put up with being banned from changing to a different brand of coffee, cornflakes or broadband. We expect to be able to choose between a dizzying array of different car insurers or energy firms. But trains? No.

Stephen Hammond (Wimbledon) (Con): Although I agree with my hon. Friend that franchising has severe problems and has run its course, does he agree that one of the principal problems is Network Rail and its inability efficiently to allocate track access, and the money it gets for investment and upgrading, to the franchises, as it would do if there were more open access on the system?

John Penrose: I completely agree; Network Rail has all the wrong incentives. I plan to lay out how we might be able to improve them in future. If it had the right incentives to find and to build more capacity, it would be better for Network Rail, the travelling public and rail firms.

If franchising is bust, I will come on to what I think is an alternative in a second. Before I do so, at the risk of perhaps annoying some of my friends in the Labour party, I must pause to say that I am afraid I do not think renationalisation is a valid option as an alternative at the moment. That is not because of the staff, the ownership models or anything like that; it is because politicians, people such as us in this room, no matter whether we are from the political left or right, are generally useless managers of a complicated operation such as a rail system. We take short-term decisions based on elections rather than proper investment cycles, we meddle in details we know little about and we frequently cave in to the vested interests of management or staff at the expense of customers. Anyone who remembers the bad old days of British Rail will know it was a disaster: an uncomfortable, unreliable service with few passengers, starved of investment and with shockingly bad industrial relations. It is pretty hard to argue that it represented some long-lost golden age of rail that we ought to return to.

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a lot of misunderstanding in the debate about rail? The fact is that all the track, signals and stations are nationalised and publicly provided, and the small amount of competition is just a competition, once in a while, to run to a timetable that is state approved and controlled, and to standards that are laid down by the state. We effectively have a nationalised monopoly at the moment.

John Penrose: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend. I fear that renationalisation is trying to answer the wrong question when we are starting from a position where we, as taxpayers, own the track and network in the first place. It is time to stop obsessing about the failed and stale old-fashioned options of yesterday, whether franchising or nationalisation, and instead to try a new, better alternative that puts passengers first. Open access rail breaks up the franchises so passengers have a choice of different train companies on their local route. If they do not like one, they do not have to wait 10 years or more for the next franchise to be signed, because a different firm’s train will be along in a few minutes.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I wonder whether there is an opportunity to put into practice what my hon. Friend is suggesting would provide a much better alternative to the existing model?

John Penrose: My hon. Friend is exactly right; it is much easier to introduce open access rail where there is no established incumbent franchise operator at all. I plan to go on and develop that idea on a broader basis along just the line he mentions, but that is a good example to get us started, if I can put it that way.

Open access rail forces train companies to raise their game; therefore, open access services are usually better. They are far less brittle, for a start, because no single
company can dictate the entire timetable. Fares tend to rise more slowly. There are fewer delays and less overcrowding. This is not some unproven experiment. If we talk to local people in Hull, for example, where open access is already in place, or the Labour and Conservative MPs who represent them in that area, the verdict is cross-party and pretty unanimous: they all think it is great.

Dr Dan Poulter (Central Suffolk and North Ipswich) (Con): I am sympathetic to my hon. Friend’s point; he is making a good speech and I congratulate him on securing the debate. He is right to say that renationalisation of the franchises is not a panacea for improving reliability and quality. He is making some good points about open access rail improving competition, which I am not unsympathetic to, and putting the passenger first; but what about those areas where there is potentially a non-profitable railway line? Would passengers perhaps be the losers in that situation rather than the winners, and would a reduced service be the result?

John Penrose: That is a crucial point. The answer is that if we do any system wrong then passengers could lose out. It is perfectly possible to organise open access rail in a way that avoids the problem that my hon. Friend rightly points out could exist. If he will bear with me for a second, I plan to develop that point a little further, but he is absolutely right to point out that it is a potential difficulty if it is not properly designed in.

In principle, the reason that open access works is that it treats trains like air travel. Heathrow or Gatwick let you fly to Paris or Rome on a choice of different airlines, not just one. Why can we not do the same for rail in a way that avoids the problem that my hon. Friend’s point, he is sympathetic to, and putting the passenger first; but what about those areas where there is potentially a non-profitable railway line? Would passengers perhaps be the losers in that situation rather than the winners, and would a reduced service be the result?

So what is the obstacle? What is stopping us from getting on and doing that tomorrow? The answer is: not much, apart from the existing franchises, which brings us to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) raised. Any rail firm that has paid a very large amount of money to buy itself a franchise monopolies on a particular route will understandably be unhappy if someone suggests it ought to face competition from another operator as well. Rail firms would experiment more creatively with new routes that passengers are not getting at the moment, and if one firm was crippled by strikes, we could still get to work on another firm’s trains.

What about those areas where there is potentially a non-profitable railway line? Would passengers perhaps be the losers in that situation rather than the winners, and would a reduced service be the result?

At that stage, at that moment, there is an opportunity. There is no one with a vested interest in protecting an existing franchise investment, or with legal contractual rights, on that route. We can change the system completely. Ask train companies about open access competition on a route where they own a franchise and, understandably, they will bridle; but ask them the same question on a route where there is no incumbent, and their reaction changes profoundly. Let us take the opportunity that every franchise end point can offer and steadily, progressively, route by route change things for the better.

We should start with the east coast main line. We should auction track slots, so Network Rail suddenly has a huge incentive to find and build more capacity on the network, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wimbeldon (Stephen Hammond) said. We should let train firms try out new services, to connect places that are not linked at the moment or to run existing services more efficiently.

We should bundle some slots together for peak commuter services into cities such as London or Bristol, or for less economic stations, as my hon. Friend the Member for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich (Dr Poulter) said, and expect some to need reverse auctions, where we are minimising a subsidy rather than maximising income, as a result.

We should stop specifying which rolling stock train firms have to use in minute detail, down sometimes to the design of the fabric on the seats, and replace reams of complicated legal paperwork with a few simple, easily measured common standards of good-quality train performance, safety, overcrowding and reliability, which every train firm has to hit. That would turn open access from being a bit-part, marginal add-on to franchising into the main event—the central, mainstream way of organising and running the entire rail network. It would be simpler, less brittle, more creative and flexible, and better value for money for passengers and taxpayers alike. It would be more efficient in the way it used the network and how it invested scarce resources in track or rolling stock. Best of all, it would, at long last, put the passenger first. I look forward to the Minister’s enthusiastic response.

Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) for securing the debate.

Railways are one of the great examples of this country’s industrial and innovative spirit, which is often symbolised by the Forth rail bridge in Scotland. It was designed by Sir William Arol, who for many years resided in Ayr in my constituency. Examples of the revival of our railways in the last two decades, after half a century of almost unrelenting decline, are an achievement that warrants more recognition. Since privatisation in 1995, the number of rail passengers in the United Kingdom has more than doubled—way beyond our expectations—and has surpassed all previous records. Britain is once again a nation that runs on its railways.

However, that achievement brings new challenges. We have more rail passengers, and they want and deserve a better service and seek better value for money. To achieve that, we cannot go back to the old system that saw passengers desert the railways for other means of transport. We must instead build on the progress that we have made.

The principle behind privatisation is that competition delivers more investment, better service and better value for the customer, which, to a degree, can be proven. While the situation has improved since the days of British Rail, which I remember well, there is still a shortage of genuine competition on our railways. The vast
majority of rail services in this country are run by franchises—essentially time-limited monopolies granted by the Government. It is easy to see how this system limits competition, especially in Scotland, where the overwhelming majority of services are provided by one operator, Abellio ScotRail, which has a Dutch parent company. Abellio took over the ScotRail franchise in 2015, but questions already have to be asked about its performance. We could in parallel ask about Network Rail’s performance.

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman support calls from the Scottish National party that responsibility for Network Rail Scotland be devolved to the Scottish Government, so that Network Rail does not answer to two different Governments?

Bill Grant: My simple reply to that is no, I would not support that at all. Network Rail works by being interconnected throughout the United Kingdom.

Alan Brown: You just criticised Network Rail Scotland.

Bill Grant: That is correct, and it was a fair comment. ScotRail cannot be blamed entirely, because Network Rail is a key player in the movement of rolling stock within the United Kingdom, including in Scotland.

Under the franchise, ScotRail is supposed to move towards a punctuality target of 92.5%, but in reality it is going backwards. Since August 2017, punctuality has dropped from 91.2% to just 88.7%. That is only if we count trains that are four minutes and 59 seconds late as being on time, so it may be that the figures are slightly skewed.

While getting the most out of franchise arrangements is important, fostering greater competition and giving commuters more choice is also crucial to improving the quality of service for commuters. There are already a number of open access operators, as was mentioned. Grand Central and Hull Trains are consistently at the top of the passenger satisfaction rankings, and the presence of open-access competition has led to more passenger journeys, higher revenues and lower fares, which suits commuters.

The fact is that competition works, and we should look at what we can do to enhance it, not stamp it out. I therefore call on all parties involved—the UK Government, the Scottish Government and Network Rail—to consider what action they can take to break down barriers and secure more open access operators running more services on the United Kingdom’s railways. That is not only because open access operators tend to run good services, but because, through competition and choice, they can be a wake-up call to the franchise operators.

ScotRail and the franchises across the UK could do with being kept on their toes, not only by the looming threat of the next franchise renewal but by open access challengers. Our railways have the potential to be an even greater British success story, but only if we avoid the trap of nostalgia. We should not go backwards to a system that suits commuters more choice is also crucial to improving the quality of service for commuters. There are already a number of open access operators, as was mentioned. Grand Central and Hull Trains are consistently at the top of the passenger satisfaction rankings, and the presence of open-access competition has led to more passenger journeys, higher revenues and lower fares, which suits commuters.

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London, and people in Selby will ask whether it will mean the end of the Hull Trains service to London. I hope the answer to those questions will be no. With those remarks, I sit down, admonished.

4.58 pm

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): I strongly support the proposition of my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose)—that we could do with more competition and choice on the railways. The Hull example is great, and I am pleased that it has cross-party support. That city was not well served by the existing monopoly system. It allowed competitive challenge and granted an extra service, and everybody seems happy with it.

That example demonstrates that it is possible to introduce competitive challenge into what is effectively a nationalised monopoly system at the moment. We had rather more competition and choice in the early days of franchising, when it shook things up and improved services, but it is clearly not doing that to any great extent anymore, because successive Governments have wanted more control and authority over the detail and specification of the franchises. In the only competition that there has been, one or two bidders have bid too enthusiastically, and we have then had the embarrassment of their walking away. People rightly ask what they added and whether they were genuinely at risk if they were able to walk away. They would say, “Well, Network Rail didn’t deliver the capacity we were promised, so we weren’t able to deliver the services,” and they would say that the rest of the structure—the controls over timetabling and specification down to the kind of minutiae that my hon. Friend mentioned—made it impossible for them to achieve the changes or innovations that might have led to a profitable service for them and a better service for the customer. There is, therefore, quite a lot of common ground between the parties that the existing system needs considerable change. As my hon. Friend said, we have all had experiences of broken and bad services in recent months, and our constituents have been let down all too often when they have tried to make the journey to work.

My own experience is that I often visit cities and towns around our country, because I love our country and I wish to stay in touch with more of it than just my constituency, and often when I am trying to get back to London to do the rest of my job, I book myself on a fast train and some previous service has been delayed. There may have been a driver problem with a slow train; more often, there will have been a big signalling problem earlier in the day. Then, not only is our service delayed when it arrives, but it gets progressively more delayed into London, depending on how far out we started, because it gets stuck behind stopper services that are themselves delayed, and then everyone is extremely frustrated and the businesses are in the dock for failure to deliver. That is particularly hard for the franchise company if it is indeed a Network Rail failure. It is more fitting that it should get the anger of the travellers if the issue was its own inadequacy at managing.

I therefore have a lot of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says, but I want to explore the most difficult part of his proposition. I am all in favour of open access and different competition. I agree with him that if people can offer services that the public actually want, rather than having to accept a managed best guess—probably over-managed by the Government—that would be better. I am just a bit concerned about how the network monopoly would still operate. My hon. Friend makes a very good point: he says that if there were open access to the network, presumably it would still be a public sector monopoly, but it would have an incentive to provide more capacity, because obviously the more open-access services it ran on its tracks, the more revenue it would gain. We would hope that it would behave in a positive way, even though it was a public monopoly, and we would see that that was its main aim, and we presume that a Minister would instruct it that it needed to provide more capacity.

We first need to ask ourselves how we could get the extra capacity in our current system at a sensible price, whatever model of ownership and running the railways we might want, and then we need to look at how a particular model might operate. It seems to me that there are two relatively good-value and straightforward fixes for capacity that we need to do more of. I do not myself think that we can carry on with the idea that we will simply build new railway lines. The High Speed 2 expenditure is a very wasteful way of doing that and it will also do quite a lot of commercial damage to the routes that it takes on when it opens up, so we will have excess capacity on that particular set of routes and still be chronically short of capacity everywhere else. We are chronically short of capacity particularly at peak times into main cities, and the best thing the railway can do is move an awful lot of people at roughly the same time, when it has a clear advantage over the roads. We chronically lack capacity when it could do a really good job and provide an answer for people who are prepared to pay very high sums of money for a season ticket in order to carry out a job that often is not that well paid. They expect, in return for that, reliability and a seat on a train, which is a luxury that many of them do not get under the current system.

As I have said, there are two ways in which we can expand capacity more quickly. The most important, which the Government are now experimenting with—I urge them to go further and faster—is the wholesale adoption of digital signalling. According to my understanding of the technology and the expertise in the industry, it would be quite easy to get a 25% increase in capacity by introducing digital signalling. If we fly in a light aircraft over Britain at the peak time in the morning or evening, we will see completely clogged main roads into and out of the cities and largely empty railway track into and out of the cities because there is typically a 2-mile gap between the trains, for very good safety reasons. But with digital technology, it would be possible to run a really safe railway and have fewer gaps between the trains. Of course I want a very safe railway, and largely we have a very safe railway; we want to be able to take that for granted. However, given that the trains should all be going in the same direction on the same piece of track, and given that through the signalling system they should not be intersecting with one another in the way road traffic does, it should be possible to run more trains on a continuous piece of track with clear visibility, a satellite system and a digital communications system, which would act as a restraint were two trains to get into the wrong place. They would be able to see
each other electronically, and there could even be automatic override, although I think drivers are quite capable of keeping the trains safe, and that is one of their main functions in such a situation.

I therefore urge the Minister to roll digital signalling out more quickly, and we may be able to go on from a 25% capacity uplift to a rather bigger capacity uplift, because the tracks remain remarkably empty when one is standing in quite a busy station, waiting for a train. It can be a very long wait, and not much else happens. We think to ourselves, “If this were a main road, I would have seen a thousand cars by now,” and we have seen two trains. We think to ourselves, “This is crazy. We have these fabulous routes. There must be a safe way of developing them.” And the great news is that there is, because digital technology, satellites in skies and the ability to know exactly where things are give us that capacity.

The other thing that I think is needed, to deal with the problem of the people going long haul needing a different pace of train on a single piece of track that also has to take stopper trains, which go much more slowly, is a bit more investment in bypasses. We do not need very long sections of track; we just need regular sections of track where we have double-tracked where there was a bit of spare land—there is quite a lot of waste and spare land around the railway system—so that the fast trains know that they have to go only another 3 or 4 miles down the track and there will be a short bit of track, with appropriate signalling, where they can get past the slow train without any problem. Then we would undo some of the damage that has been done by the timetable disruption through the absent driver, broken signal, broken rail or whatever it is that has caused the problem that day.

You will be pleased to know that this will be a short speech, Mrs Moon. In conclusion, open access, competition and choice can make a difference, but we need to tackle the capacity problem. Perhaps my hon. Friend is right to say that we can do that with a monopoly provider, or perhaps we have to look at models whereby individual dominant players on a route network with open access take responsibility for the capacity provision with the regulator, because we need to ensure what whoever holds the track not only has a theoretical incentive to provide more capacity, but actually wants to provide more capacity. We may need a market model for that, because up to this point Network Rail has been bitterly disappointing, very backward looking and slow at answering what the public want, which is a lot more peak-time capacity into our towns and cities.

5.7 pm

Alan Brown (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. Like other hon. Members, I congratulate the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) on initiating the debate and putting forward new ideas and thinking on the operation of the rail system. One thing that I think we can all agree on is that, as the hon. Gentleman said in his opening remarks, the existing franchise system is absolutely broken. There are too many direct awards, which means a lack of competition and less pressure on prices. We have had the east coast main line shambles. No matter how we dress it up, Virgin Trains East Coast has been able to walk away owing the taxpayer £2 billion. That is a £2 billion write-off of bad debt. There are also the ongoing issues with Southern Railway, and of course there are the latest timetabling issues, so there is no doubt that the franchising system as it is operating under this Government is not working; it is not fit for purpose.

The hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare stated his belief that franchises put train companies first, rather than passengers. I certainly agree that train companies—obviously—have to make profits, but I would suggest that with open access there would still be companies that would have to make profits, so they might still be driven to display the same behaviours.

John Penrose: Nothing says that open access has to be among profit-making companies. There could be not-for-profits and publicly owned companies, providing that they all compete with one another on a level playing field. I just want to reassure the hon. Gentleman about that.

Alan Brown: As a complete free marketeer, I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman is saying that we can have not-for-profit and public sector involvement. I agree with that sentiment.

I think, however, that the hon. Gentleman has oversimplified how this could work. It was suggested that if one train company is not operating to satisfaction, a passenger can switch to another train company, just like shopping for coffee. I have a funny feeling it will not be that simple for widespread open access. We have heard the benefits that open access can bring, but the reality is that train operators will still be bound by the same constraints of the existing network, particularly station capacity at mainstream stations. There therefore might not be the flexibility to have so many train operators competing. Slot access has to be managed. We must also consider the movement of freight on the rails. There are a number of elements that need to be understood and factored in, which might restrict open access slot availability.

It was suggested that that might incentivise Network Rail to build more capacity. At the end of the day, however, if that is an incentive for Network Rail, the taxpayer still has to fund Network Rail upfront for the costs or Network Rail will have to borrow against optimistic future track rental fees. There is a risk, therefore, that it will not incentivise Network Rail to start duplicating rail networks across the UK.

It was also said that this would be comparable to the way we shop around for air services. I do not think that is comparable. The constraints on Heathrow stiffen competition just now. There is not the widespread competition in air routes that everybody would like to see. Particularly for connectivity in Scotland, passengers do not have the choice that we would like. Again, it is a slightly idealistic comparison. Having said that, I welcome the suggestion. It has merits and it can work, but it will not be able to work as an entity by itself, because we will still need to protect the less-profitable routes. I suggest that it would need to be part of the mix, but I would not dismiss it out of hand.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant), in my opinion, wrongly conflated cause and effect with the end of British Rail—franchising was brought in, and suddenly passenger numbers rocketed and all the rest of it—but that was because Government
constraints on investment in the rail rolling stock were lifted. There was therefore investment in the rolling stock, which the franchises were allowed to do, but that investment was still paid for by a combination of train users and the general taxpayer, because many franchises are subsidised. It was a direct consequence of privatising British Rail and breaking up the rail network, but of allowing that investment to take place. Too often, many Conservative MPs seem to think that franchising the system created magic money. They seem to think that the franchises were like the Prime Minister's magic money tree, but they are not. It is always funded from somewhere—that is, from the general taxpayer.

Bill Grant: I think the hon. Gentleman is distorting what I was saying. I clearly said that passenger numbers had doubled. In life, we have to deal in facts. That was a clear fact, and I went into the details and the reasons why. The trains certainly did improve in quality. I use them on a weekly basis, going north to south. The quality of the train rolling stock is very good.

Alan Brown: I thank the hon. Gentleman for clarifying. I remind him, however, that he repeatedly spoke about the bad old days of British Rail. I am just reminding him that those so-called bad old days were because the Government would not allow any investment, so it was not necessarily a function of British Rail being a national rail company.

The hon. Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock also mentioned the Scottish Government working with the UK Government, with which we all agree. I would point out that in terms of funding for control period 6, the UK Government just told the Scottish Government what funding they were getting. There was a big shortfall. There was no consultation on how that would happen. There has been an ongoing, constant refusal to devolve Network Rail. We have seen recent events, such as with the fisheries White Paper, on which there has been no consultation with the Scottish Government. I agree that it would be ideal if the two Governments could work better together, but I suggest that there is a clear fault line. The UK Government are imposing stuff on the Scottish Government and not consulting.

We heard a last-minute entry into the market, as it were, from the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan). He highlighted the benefits of competition and open access slots in his area. That is important. It was good to hear how that has benefited his constituents. Like him, I welcome the potential future Scotland-London link-up and the predicted lower rail fares. That can only be good for passengers travelling on the east coast main line. As he has a wee habit of doing, there was a slight bit of friendly fire against Labour's policy of nationalising rail, because he is concerned about what that would mean for the open access slots for his constituents. I look forward to the shadow Minister's response on that.

Lastly, we heard from the right hon. Member for Wokingham (John Redwood). He said towards the end that he had made a short speech, but I thought he was in danger of speaking longer than the lead sponsor of the debate. Given how long I have been speaking, however, I am maybe being a wee bit hypocritical, I admit. He highlighted the failings of Network Rail. Other hon. Members did so in interventions, too. I remind them that Network Rail is answerable to the Secretary of State, so when we talk about the failings of Network Rail, it is an admission of the failure of the UK Government and the Secretary of State for Transport. They seem to agree with Opposition Members that the Transport Secretary is not up to the job.

As I said, there is some merit in open access, but I do not think it is a one-size-fits-all solution or that it will be the panacea for a new smoothly operating Network Rail. There is no doubt that profitable routes will be cherry-picked. We need to protect non-profitable routes. I also have concerns, if it was too widespread, about what this could mean for investment in rolling stock. Rolling stock investment has a long payback period. That is what is supposed to underpin the franchise system at the moment. Franchise holders get a longer award, which allows them to borrow to invest in the rolling stock, so if there are not any longer award periods, there is a risk that there will not be that long-term investment.

On passengers' general choices, I challenge the UK Government to speed up the connection of High Speed 2 to Scotland—at the moment, as we know, it will stop at Crewe—and to look at improved investment in the existing network north of Crewe. That is really important.

Competition is good. I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare acknowledges that we can and should have public sector involvement. There cannot be too much open access. It cannot be massively increased while we have the existing franchise system, so the Government would need to do a complete overhaul of how the rail system operates. Given the failures of the franchise system, that overhaul is long overdue.

5.18 pm

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I know what an interest you and other south Wales MPs have in the rail network, not least since we saw the announcement of de-electrification last summer.

I thank the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) for bringing this debate to the Chamber. There was another debate on the same subject only yesterday afternoon. It is interesting to see how many Back Benchers and members of the Conservative party now recognise that the franchising system simply is not working. We have been saying for such a long time that it is failing and has no mechanism for success.

I am glad that that recognition is there. It has been brought to the fore over the last two months with the complete meltdown of the timetable and the real pain that that has put the travelling public through. The chaos continues even today. We have a new timetable coming in this weekend. We are holding our breath to see whether that will make a difference. Quite frankly, the public has had enough and wants change. They have said that they want a nationalised railway, and I will touch on what that means for the future.

I agree with the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare, who wrote in The Telegraph that the chaos and the franchising system are symptoms of a broken rail franchising system that's so brittle and inflexible it's causing misery for millions. Franchises put train firms first, rather than passengers.
That cannot be the case when we are talking about a public service. I will depart from agreement with him at that point, as he might expect.

I want to pick up the point about the range of options that would be available if there was an open access system, and the thinking that if someone’s train did not arrive on time, they could simply pop on to another train. We know that does not work at the moment under open access, and in fact, there is real frustration among the travelling public that they have to buy a new train ticket or wait at the station until that operator sends another train. Open access will not solve the ills that have been described.

The fragmentation across the railway system has failed, and bringing more operators on to the system through open access would mean more fragmentation, which is the last thing that the rail system needs. The whole rail industry is clearly saying that we need to bring the rail system together. In particular, its focus has been on bringing track and train together to ensure that wheel and steel connect, so there can be a conversation about what happens on the infrastructure and between the trains that run on it. That has universal support. I agree with the Government, who have also said that that is absolutely essential. Bringing more competition and more rail operators on to the rail operating system will further fragment those relationships.

I want to pick up the challenge about the creativity of new routes. Those opportunities will exist under any system. The complexity sits in the fact that many of those routes cross traditional route lines—the main lines—so they become more complex for timetabling. We need integration, rather than fragmentation, to address those challenges.

Labour has clearly said that we would introduce a programme of nationalisation of the railway system, but I want to make it clear to all hon. Members that that is not going back; it is moving forward to a new system of nationalisation. Just as hon. Members have articulated that they want new private-market models operating on the railways, there is no one system of nationalisation. That is what we have focused on in developing our model. We have worked closely with the rail industry, rail operators—who are embracing what we are saying—and people working across the infrastructure, and we have looked at examples globally, on how best to run the railway system in the future and how to put in the challenge, opportunity, enhancements and vital long-term investment to ensure that we have a system that works best for the future.

As the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Alan Brown) said, we need only remind ourselves that the fact that more people are on our rail system is extraordinary, with the Secretary of State at the head and making decisions about which lines will be electrified. The level of political interference today across the rail system is extraordinary, with the Secretary of State at the head and making decisions about which lines will be electrified. A Labour Government would not be interested in doing that. We want the rail service to run the rail service; we do not want the state to interfere. We will set the strategy, and the nationalised company will run the railways. People who are the experts in running the railways should move forward, rather than politicians who, frankly, make political decisions about the railways, as they are today. That would not happen under the nationalised company that we will put forward to run the railways.

We would structure the railways to ensure that we get that long-term investment, because the cry from industry is that the Government changing their mind about electrification and other projects has meant that it has had to not only gain skills and put apprenticeships on to build up to a programme that the Government said was going ahead, but then lay people off. What a waste of talent, let alone resource. We want a long-term plan. The franchising system and the open access system do not serve that need. The public are demanding that we ensure that investment, so we can plan our infrastructure changes and co-ordinate them with the routes and enhancements, such as the new rails and new opportunities, that we want to bring on to the track. That is what a Labour Government will deliver when we come to power.

One thing that has not even been mentioned in the debate, although I appreciate it is about passenger choice, is that we need to ensure that the rail network is there for freight. Operators across the network also need to have good access to our tracks and the ability to move goods across our country. As we are talking about the future of our economy, it is crucial that those choices are made for the sake of our economy, and that they work.

In the future, we have to say where the investment will come from. Open access is not the answer to longer term investment in our railways. The franchising system ensures that there is a profit margin that can go to companies, although many are not receiving those profits because, quite frankly, they are failing. The amount of money that leaks out of the system is not acceptable to the taxpayer. With regard to the recent chaos, we could be talking about £1 billion of taxpayers’ money being used to pay the compensation due to that failed timetable. It failed because of franchisers putting in their different demands and everyone wanting their new routes put on to a new timetable, and the Secretary of State changing his mind about his priorities and not leaving sufficient time to put a new timetable in place. The Secretary of State’s decision making and the infighting among the railways has been so costly. That will disappear with our nationalised railway system, because we will not have the barriers that could create that.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): Order. I hope the shadow Minister is about to wind up. We have to hear from the Minister yet.
Rachael Maskell: I am watching the time. I will not go over my halfway mark.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): You have gone over your five minutes considerably.

Rachael Maskell: Five minutes?

Mrs Madeleine Moon (in the Chair): In an hour debate, it is five minutes.

Rachael Maskell: No one has ever told me that before, so thank you, Mrs Moon. I will come to my conclusion.

We want to ensure that the rail system works for passengers, that it improves social mobility, that it drives our whole economy forward and that it causes modal shift, to ensure that people are not getting into their cars, as they are today, but back on to the railways. That is why Labour’s model will work, and when we get into power, we will put it in place.

5.29 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Joseph Johnson): It is a pleasure, Mrs Moon, to serve under your chairmanship.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (John Penrose) on securing this import debate, which, as he is aware, follows hard on the heels of a similar debate yesterday. We wait months for a debate on open access, then two come along at once. He made a terrific and really powerful speech, and I very much look forward to addressing in my remarks some of the points that he and other right hon. and hon. Members raised.

First, I will say that I and the Government are truly grateful to all the staff on the railway network. In about 90 minutes, I am sure that many of them would want to watch England play Croatia in the World cup semi-final, but instead they will be performing sterling duties, keeping the railways running and the trains moving. I just want to register for the record how grateful I am to them for that. This is a debate about choice and competition, and those members of staff will not necessarily have that choice later on today.

The choice to be able to travel by rail at all is one of the most important things that we can offer people. Whether they travel to commute to work, to do business or to connect with friends and loved ones, we want to offer people the choice of a wide range of journeys and services, and the railway has been steadily delivering more and more of that choice. The number of passenger journeys on offer in Great Britain has increased by over a quarter since privatisation and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock (Bill Grant) said earlier, passenger numbers have more than doubled.

Since 2015 alone, we have opened 21 new stations on the national rail network, including in communities such as Bradford, Midlothian and Devon. These stations offer new journey opportunities and relieve the urban congestion that slows down growth.

Having just heard the remarks of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesperson, the hon. Member for York Central (Rachael Maskell), I believe that she would do well to heed the concerns that were conveyed by the hon. Member for Keighley (John Grogan). I believe that he is absolutely right to be concerned about the loss of choice that would undoubtedly result from the policy of wholesale nationalisation of the entire railway network advocated by the Labour party.

Our commitments to go further and to make further investment will meet demands for more capacity on the network. That was a point spoken to powerfully by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (John Redwood). He was absolutely right to ask the important questions that he did about how we can deliver more capacity more efficiently, and he made important and valuable points about the need to accelerate the roll-out of digital signalling and the development of the digital railway in general, and also about the need for further investment in passing loops. I reassure him on digital signalling that we absolutely recognise the benefits that he spoke of, and that the roll-out of digital signalling across the UK is under way. Emblematic features of that roll-out are in parts of the Thameslink programme, for example, and in Crossrail.

We are also committed to giving passengers the choice of how to pay for their journey, including smart cards, contactless cards and mobile phone payments. The railway also offers passengers a range of times at which to travel and flexibility over when they want to return, all provided for through a single, joined-up ticketing system. So we are fully behind the idea of offering passengers choice and our strategic vision for rail, which was published last November, set out our plans to offer even more choice.

My hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare spoke about a further type of choice in his remarks—indeed, it was the focus of his remarks—and that is choice of operator. For many journeys, passengers have a choice of operators. However, it is not always practical or efficient to have multiple operators running on the same route. On many commuter routes, having a single operator is the best way to meet passengers’ preferences. This was recognised by the Competition and Markets Authority in its 2016 report on passenger rail competition. Passengers on these routes generally want a “turn-up-and-go” service, whereby they can get on the next train. With multiple competing, non-franchised operators, this would not be possible, because passengers’ tickets would only be valid on one operator’s services.

However—I am about to make remarks that I believe are important—we are committed to ensuring that there is a place for choice between operators in some specific cases. That is particularly so on inter-city lines, where travel is often more discretionary; for example, where people are visiting family and friends, or indeed many of the great tourist destinations that the UK has to offer, including, obviously, Weston-super-Mare, which is a place close to my heart. These passengers often book in advance and take a specific train, allowing them to choose a service that best suits their needs.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the east coast main line in his remarks.

John Penrose: Before the Minister moves on—he is being very helpful in trying to cover all the different points—may I just ask him a question? He just mentioned and celebrated the existence of this integrated ticketing system that he is talking about. Does that not rather solve the problem that he is then saying will crop up if we try to have people who cannot turn up and go using different operators on the same line?
Joseph Johnson: To some extent but not entirely—I think that is the answer to my hon. Friend’s question. An integrated ticketing system enables people to buy a ticket for any journey anywhere in the country; it does not necessarily enable them to buy a ticket that is fungible across operators.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the east coast main line, where there are no fewer than 11 passenger operators, including the two open access operators, Hull Trains and Grand Central, which have delivered huge benefits for the communities they serve. Alternatively, take the west coast main line, where Great North Western Railway has recently been granted rights to run open access services between London and Blackpool alongside the franchised operator. That will offer passengers a choice of operators and up to six extra direct services to Blackpool per day, on top of the franchised services already available to them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) mentioned the new east coast railway. It is right that we consider all options for that new railway, which is under development, so that we deliver the best outcome for passengers and taxpayers, but we must also deliver all types of service, which a free market on its own would not do. So unless they can make a profit, franchises can get this balance right for everyone.

I am clear that open access is an important part of the railway, and can play a greater role in offering greater choice, in the right circumstances.

John Redwood: One day when I was trying to get back from Birmingham to London, I had pre-booked on service A to terminus A and that service was up the spout, so service A very kindly said that I could go on service B—a different company on a different route to a different terminus—and it just honoured the ticket. So there is clearly a way of making these tickets interoperable if the companies wish.

Joseph Johnson: My right hon. Friend has made an important observation. We can certainly look at ways to make tickets more fungible, but the purpose of the present integrated smart ticketing system is to enable passengers to “turn up and go”, to use the latest technology and so on. As it, however, has not focused on making tickets fungible between operators, and I am sure that is something that, as the open access policy develops and as open access develops as a feature of our system, will become more prevalent.

As the CMA recommended, however, a greater role for open access requires robust reforms to create a level playing field between different types of operator. At present, as my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare knows, open access operators do not pay towards the fixed costs of the network on which they operate, nor do they contribute towards the vital social services that the franchised operators that they compete with deliver. That distorts the incentives of operators and means that we cannot realise the full benefits of competition for passengers.

That is why we are now working closely with the Office of Rail Regulation on its proposals for reforming track access charges in the next rail control period, from 2019 to 2024. These reforms will see open access operators pay an appropriate amount towards the fixed costs of the network where they are able to. We support this move as a vital step in creating the level playing field between open access and franchised operators.

We have also consulted on a possible public service obligation levy. Such a levy would complement track access charging reform, so that open access operators would also pay towards the social services that franchises deliver to many stations. Those stations would not have the levels of service they do today if left entirely to the free market, and the Government offer greater passenger choice through the franchising system to deliver social as well as economic benefits.

John Penrose: The Minister is being generous with his time. I suggest to him that he can avoid quite a lot of this regulatory and bureaucratic complexity if he simply switches to auctioning track slots for these things. At that point, the market-clearing price would be discovered. He does not have to set all these other additional points at all.

Joseph Johnson: I just observe that the franchising system as it exists today is already a version of the auction that my hon. Friend describes, in the sense that franchise bidders bid a specification that they feel is optimal for that area and the Department then assesses their bids. It is, in effect, an auction in some ways.

A greater contribution by open access operators towards the cost of the railways and a more level playing field should lead to more opportunities for open access services, and thus potentially greater choice for passengers. However, it is crucial that we get the reforms in place first, so that we can start on the right footing. I leave my hon. Friend a moment to wind up.

5.40 pm

John Penrose: I thank everybody who has contributed to this afternoon’s debate. There has not been complete cross-party unanimity—far from it—but what we do have is a clear framing of a likely political choice. I encourage the Minister, who has been helpful and encouraging, to go further and faster in this area. At that point, we will frame a very clear political choice between those who want to give passengers more choice through competition and those who want to do it in a different way. At that point, voters would at least then know what they are voting for and choosing on the day.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House has considered increasing choice for rail passengers.

5.41 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Westminster Hall

Thursday 12 July 2018

[Mr Peter Bone in the Chair]

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Banking Sector Failures

1.30 pm

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): I beg to move,
That this House has considered failures in the banking sector.

It is a privilege to serve under your chairmanship and guidance, Mr Bone, as we find ourselves gathered to discuss the banking situation. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for facilitating this debate and the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for co-sponsoring it.

On 10 May, I was proud to lead a main Chamber debate, in which I raised the section 166 report and called for full redress for the victims of profound financial misconduct. Today’s motion is deliberately phrased more broadly, to enable us to reflect our constituents’ many frustrations with the banking industry. I am therefore glad that we have been given a significant amount of time to discuss this issue. There will be a diverse range of submissions from Members who wish to discuss their constituency matters.

The all-party parliamentary group on fair business banking and hon. Members from across the House recognise that work is continuing within the industry, and with UK Finance and the Financial Conduct Authority, to drive higher standards and accountability. Hard lines need to be drawn so that we can not only solve the ongoing disputes, but prevent another conduct crisis in the future. It is our firm and unwavering position that things have not changed sufficiently to prevent the abuses of power we continue to see in the financial services industry and the surrounding supporting professional sectors and service areas of law, valuation, Law of Property Act receivership and insolvency. The APPG will focus on those areas with renewed vigour in the coming months.

Hon. Members and the APPG engage regularly with UK Finance and the FCA, and we see a genuine will to drive higher standards in the industry. We look forward to continuing to work together, and we appreciate the forthright relationship we have developed. UK Finance, in particular, has shown itself to be an industry leader, and we sincerely hope it challenges the industry to be the best it can be.

I want to focus on the banking industry’s failure to support small businesses, and the erosion of trust between such businesses and banks. Small and medium-sized enterprises are pivotal to the UK economy. They constitute 99.9% of businesses operating in Britain. They bring in £1.8 trillion in annual turnover and employ just over 60% of people in the private sector. They are the lifeblood of our nation’s economy, but worryingly, the critical bond of trust between them and business banking has never been lower.

From payment protection insurance complaints to the HBOS Reading fraud and the toxic culture at the Royal Bank of Scotland’s Global Restructuring Group, the industry has systematically failed small business across the UK. I want to discuss the attitude towards small business owners, the devastating impact of past misconduct, and the future.

I have spoken to small business owners, and the foundation of the problem is often simple access to finance—a problem highlighted by bank closures. Beyond the bricks and mortar of local banks lies a bond of trust between the business owner, the financial adviser and the bank manager. Since 2015, we have lost or are due to lose banks in Prestonpans, Tranent, Gullane, North Berwick and Dunbar in East Lothian. The inhabitants of those towns have lost their connection to a local banking service. The issue disproportionately affects Scottish consumers. Between 2015 and the end of this year, 368 branches will have closed in Scotland. For the 20 million people who still rely on face-to-face banking services, that is devastating.

Ferhan Ashiq, a local entrepreneur in East Lothian, has talked about some of the provisions he has had to use since the closure. He described them as painful. He had to make a transition to alternative funding solutions, and he does not feel that enough resources are available for business owners who still rely on cash-based operations. Like many in East Lothian, he is unimpressed by the replacement bus bank service that rolls into town twice a week. The service is not fully accessible or reliable. Indeed, the very first day it was due to go to Dunbar, it failed to attend because it broke down. That is testimony to the fact that we should perhaps not believe everything we read on the side of a bus.

The effect has been that alternative funding sources have been developed, such as crowdfunding, which my constituent uses; peer-to-peer lending, which is facilitated by the Funding Circle—a firm that has created and sustained 19 jobs in East Lothian in the past 12 months—cyber-currencies; and even local stock exchanges. If we look at the history of banking, although the technology has changed, our main banks—I will not use the phrase “high street banks”, because it is becoming something of a misnomer—have followed the same pattern. They started with peer-to-peer lending and friends chipping in. Just as protection became necessary and our banks became more structured, so the world of alternative funding needs structure to its regulation and an understanding. It is not for the banks to provide that; it is for the Government to regulate so that confidence can continue to grow and develop, and not be challenged in those new alternative sources of funding, as it has been in traditional banking.

I turn to the ongoing conduct issues and our call for a full public inquiry into the treatment of businesses under financial duress. Recently, we have seen leaked reports from RBS and HBOS. There are ongoing issues with how Clydesdale bank and Yorkshire bank aggressively mis-sold interest rate hedging products and fixed-rate loans, which contained astronomical break costs. Those loans caused widespread financial distress. Rather than supporting businesses and putting things right, the banks sold the loans on to a private equity firm, Cerebus, and washed their hands of any responsibility for the damage that was caused. The consequences of those actions are still ongoing for many people. Bankruptcies and evictions from family homes are going on as we speak.
The Treasury Committee and the FCA have said on many occasions that there is work to be done if businesses are to continue to thrive and move forward. We very much look forward to the publication of the Treasury Committee’s SME finance inquiry report. The industry recommendations in the section 166 report into RBS highlighted key issues that the APPG on fair business banking has been raising for years. The report talks about unfair contracts, with contractual terms that are there to confuse customers. The Lending Standards Board has produced principles for lending contracts, and the APPG has set up a contracts working group to ensure that bank contracts match the public promise. We welcome the involvement and participation of financial firms in that.

The section 166 report also talks about the relationship between banks and third-party providers. There are consistent conflicts of interest. For example, insolvency practitioners and surveyors are motivated to work in the interests of the bank, rather than the business. That issue has been raised a number of times in debates, and with the insolvency service, banks and BEIS.

To make it crystal clear, the same mechanisms that were used by HBOS Reading, RBS GRG and Dunbar Bank, to name just a few, have not vanished, but are still being used today. There has not been a substantive change to prevent the systematic asset-stripping that was highlighted in the Turnbull report and the section 166 report on RBS GRG. Indeed, we still see cases on a weekly basis that demonstrate that the systems are still in place.

The right hon. and hon. Members who are members of the APPG are very clear that we need a comprehensive inquiry into turnaround practices, insolvency and financial institutions. The fact that HBOS Reading and RBS GRG were able to go on for so long indicates that there is a systematic failure, and we must learn lessons. The Government produced an excellent consultation on the review of the corporate insolvency framework back in 2016, and we encourage them to continue with that reform of insolvency, which is a key priority.

In the debate on 10 May, I raised the section 166 report, and called for full redress for those who have been victims of profound financial misconduct. I do not want to go over previous ground, but I want to highlight the impact of financial misconduct on working families, businesses and individuals, and the importance of redressing those profound losses.

The release report on RBS GRG not only underlined the toxic culture that existed but, critically, identified the systemic failures that allowed it to thrive. Banking misconduct is a broad term that will no doubt be discussed by Members today. I want to stress, however, that for business owners across the country who have lost their livelihoods, their homes and their marriages, and more often than not have suffered in their health, this is not past misconduct; this greets them every single day when they wake up and is with them when they go to bed every night to try to sleep. It haunts them. The impact of the scandal has been so profoundly damaging that people have taken the appalling decision to end their life because they cannot face any more.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): What really upsets me is that the people who lead those banks seem to have no honour, no decency. Where is the banking code?

Where is the way in which bankers should look after their customers? It does not seem to be present at all. That is heartbreaking.

Martin Whitfield: The hon. Gentleman makes a profound contribution. Our financial system is based on trust; our friendships are based on trust. Trust is how it started, and the present conduct of individuals within banks and the present systemic conduct of banks fracture that trust. That means we have lost something, because once trust is lost it cannot be got back—trust is given by someone but not necessarily offered again. The responsibility of this House and of financial services—this is genuinely the responsibility of everyone—is to ensure that we have answers to those questions so that at last, I hope, some people and some families find some peace and closure about events that have haunted their lives.

If I may, I draw attention to the Centre for Policy Studies’ report, “Fair Business Banking for All”, which was launched last night with the APPG. I thank the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for authoring the report and the APPG for supporting its publication and for an excellent night. Among many things, it recommends the establishment of a financial services tribunal not dissimilar to the employment tribunal system.

I am aware that the report’s proposals to enhance the legal rights of SMEs would require primary legislation, but some steps towards it would not. One recommendation is to redefine a “private person” under the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Rights of Action) Regulations 2001. A small change, the extension of the definition of a private person to cover SMEs, would allow them to take action where now they cannot do so. An extension to cover insolvent firms, many rendered insolvent by the poor conduct of banks and financial subsidiaries, would give those SMEs—and the people who are the reality behind the company—a right of action when Financial Conduct Authority rules are breached.

The last recommendation of the report is about time limits, when companies have the extra hurdle under the limitation Acts of a six or five-year period, depending on whether they are based in England and Wales, or Scotland. The limitation can frequently be overcome, but it is simply another example of how barriers are placed in the way of those who feel the greatest sense of injustice. I fully support the recommendations of the report, notably the enhancement of SME rights.

I know that the Minister is aware of and appreciates the feelings across constituencies about this matter. I ask for his comments on the following matters. Even if we are dealing with the systemic failure of our banks and banking system, we still require a full and open inquiry to understand that failure. That inquiry would benefit financial institutions, the business community and certainly the wider economy. More than that, it would bring transparency and light to the people who have suffered. The inquiry might start to provide closure for individuals who have for too long battled against the Lernaean hydra that is the financial industry. A public inquiry would establish the facts. It would allow the industry to learn from past events, offer reconciliation and re-establish accountability after a scandal that gripped financial institutions not only in our country but globally.

[Martin Whitfield]
First, therefore, will the Minister support cross-Bench calls for a full public inquiry? I realise that it is a big ask and will require a considered response, but it would be a positive step if he could at least support a joint cross-departmental taskforce to identify the extent of banking failings—impact, regulatory failings, missed opportunities—to get to the root cause of the problem and its future impacts. Such groundwork would not only be important in itself but could act as a foundation for a public inquiry.

Furthermore, on 10 May, the Minister who has joined us today—I apologise for quoting him in this—said:

“I am meeting Andrew Bailey regularly, and I hope that the FCA will conclude its investigation soon, by which I mean in the next eight to 12 weeks. As I mentioned in our debate on this topic in January, I do not wish to complicate the matter further or prejudice any outcomes while the FCA is investigating, but I am very clear that I expect it to conclude its investigations in a very short timeframe.”—[Official Report, 10 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 979.]

Today it is exactly nine weeks since that assurance. I also ask for adequate funding and expertise in the investigation of financial fraud. Part of the imbalance in power in the system comes from the reality that the expertise needed to investigate those claims is expensive and in short supply.

I fear that the banking industry has developed a worrying culture that has facilitated a breakdown in trust between that industry and business owners throughout the country. The culture is rooted in institutional misdemeanours but exacerbated by the closure of high street banks and the loss of ATMs. We need a new banking settlement to ensure that business owners in all areas of the country have access to local banking services. Those same customers must also be given an assurance that they can trust the banking hubs and, if the trust breaks down, a tribunal will act as an investigator and a way of re-establishing it.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy, which needs a trustworthy banking system to support and help SMEs to prosper. The economy is at the foundation of our society, and our society demands more from its banking system, from its financial services and its banks than it ever has from its Government. I repeat a phrase that I have used in previous debates: the victims are not going to go away.

1.47 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank the Backbench Business Committee for making this important debate possible.

I also thank the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) for his speech, which was powerful and insightful. The questions he asked deserve good answers. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) on his work in producing that valuable report. As the hon. Member for East Lothian said, this issue will not go away. A cross-party coalition of Members of Parliament will continually bring it to the fore until there is justice for those who have been so obviously wronged.

I pay tribute to our nation’s entrepreneurs, in businesses that are small, medium and large. Those entrepreneurs should be celebrated, encouraged, nurtured and, occasionally, even lionised. They are people with aspiration, ambition, ideas and entrepreneurial energy and drive. They take the calculated risks that create something, which in turn creates wealth and prosperity. They create employment, they support families and they are the true engine of our economy. To care about the future prosperity of our country is to be passionate about entrepreneurs. We should foster the energy and ambitions of our businesses.

That is why this debate matters. The one thing that we have learned from the scandals at HBOS Reading and in RBS GRG is how frighteningly easy it is for businesses, small and large, to be parted from their assets—to be taken out of their business and erased from existence. Any small technical breach of a commercial loan contract can be seized on by a bank as an excuse to foreclose on a business, even if that breach has no impact on the business’s current performance or future success. The most common rationale for this extreme measure is the allegation that the value of the property that the loan is secured on has fallen. That means that the loan-to-value covenant is breached, which gives the bank the power to appoint a Law of Property Act receiver or to put the company into administration. There are many cases of businesses that have never missed a payment but the banks have still seen fit to move in and seize the company. At that point, the owners immediately lose control of their business and can only watch helplessly from the sidelines while it is asset-stripped and destroyed.

Bob Stewart: It is really upsetting to think that companies such as GRG have these robbers—they are people who are set up to try to find something that they can use to screw their customers out of their life’s work. It is so appalling that I cannot believe it can happen, but it seems to happen all the time.

Stephen Kerr: My hon. and gallant Friend not only says the right things but says them with the passion and angst that we all feel on our constituents’ behalf.

At the stroke of a pen, and often based on a valuation that was instructed by the bank in the first place, a director or an individual loses immediate control of their business and their assets. To that end, I would like to share with hon. Members the story of one of my constituents, to add to the many other stories that have been and no doubt will be told today. My constituent’s name is John Roseman. I can do no better than to describe him in his own words from his LinkedIn profile, which I know are accurate from having met him. He describes himself as an “entrepreneur” and he is absolutely that. He fits the bill. He has “vast experience in International Business in the High Tech Arena of Microelectronics, Solar, Oil & Gas, Cleanroom Environments & High Purity Manufacturing.”

John had a business, Sematek UK, that he describes as a “Clean manufacturing service company specializing in turnkey clean environments, high purity gas, chemical and water installations, Mechanical, control and electrical engineering.”

His business had a turnover of £10 million and was based in my constituency. There are not so many businesses in my constituency that turn over £10 million, but John’s business did. He had blue chip clients across the world on every continent. His business was making money—it was profitable and had good margins. He came to see me in a surgery that I held in Dunblane, with a whole set of management accounts as evidence.
[Stephen Kerr]

The success John had made of the business that he founded in 1990 was clear and obvious. But that all changed. Suddenly, in 2011, without any notice, John had the rug pulled from under his feet. RBS said it would like security on his existing facility, but no covenant had been broken and nothing substantial had changed, except that John’s business was becoming more successful and making more money. One day, the bank appointed someone to call on his business. John thought that he had come to do an inspection on behalf of the bank. But no, this was an insolvency practitioner, whose first words to John were that his facility had been immediately withdrawn and his business put into administration by the bank. John Roseman had another company called Mov-Stor. That business was not liquidated, but RBS GRG took all its assets and sold them on. It gave him a fraction of the true worth of that business’s assets.

I spent some time with John and he gave me permission to talk about his case today. His story is just one illustration of the brutal approach of RBS GRG and other banks to small and medium-sized businesses such as John Roseman’s.

Martin Whitfield: It is interesting that when we discuss entrepreneurs in this country, we frequently talk about their inability to develop from an SME into a large company. We put that down to selling the idea abroad, except that John’s business was becoming more successful and making more money. One day, the bank appointed someone to call on his business. John thought that he had come to do an inspection on behalf of the bank. But no, this was an insolvency practitioner, whose first words to John were that his facility had been immediately withdrawn and his business put into administration by the bank. John Roseman had another company called Mov-Stor. That business was not liquidated, but RBS GRG took all its assets and sold them on. It gave him a fraction of the true worth of that business’s assets.

Stephen Kerr: The hon. Gentleman speaks well to that subject. Banks should exist to provide the capital that businesses need to scale up and become bigger, albeit for their own commercial interest, but I am sorry to have to say that is not how it works in this country.

The impact of the events on John Roseman was far more than just commercial. They had a devastating effect on him, his health—as I witnessed when I met him—and family, and his employees and their families. John’s business was stolen from him, and I make no apology for using that word.

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a brilliant speech. Does he agree that the common factor in a lot of these businesses was that businesses need to scale up and become bigger, and actually today’s debate and the effects of the finance crisis had to do is engineer a bogus breach of contract—the rest would be history. Sadly, many banks were in demand. His customers certainly had not deserted them. That is the human cost, along with the human cost to his employees, his team and their families.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely—complexity is a weapon in the hands of the banks.

RBS has been at pains to point out that Promontory entered into with customers were so complex and so cleverly—I use that word carefully—worded that they were hardly independent. Hypothetically, if a bank had a liquidity problem and needed to raise funds quickly, all it would have to do is engineer a bogus breach of contract—the rest would be history. Sadly, many banks are commonly accused of having done exactly that in the aftermath of the financial crisis.

As we can see, it is not just the bank involved—surveyors, LPA receivers and administrators all play their part. It is therefore imperative that those practitioners and their regulators are held to account for the roles they played—and continue to play—in the destruction of British businesses.

Stephen Kerr: Absolutely—complexity is a weapon in the hands of the banks.

RBS has been at pains to point out that Promontory did not find any evidence of deliberate undervaluation of properties. However, Promontory also stated in its report that in many cases it could not find any evidence that a valuation was correct. In other words, they were making it up as they went along. In such a cosy relationship, the surveyors, LPA receivers, insolvency practitioners and financial institutions all hold incredible power over the borrower. They used that power—they still can—to enrich their own firms and their balance sheet positions at the expense of viable businesses. Indeed, the section 166 report specifically refers to their searching out “opportunities” to default.
Insolvency was seen as an opportunity to get rid of troublesome complaints, as the voice of the individual businessperson was wiped out, and avenues for complaint or redress blocked, at the point of receivership or administration. In our last debate about this issue, which was in the main Chamber, I mentioned another method that some banks—Clydesdale, for example—have used to wipe out swathes of troublesome or just unwanted business customers: selling their loans on and letting a shady vulture fund, such as Cerberus, do the dirty demolition job for them.

We start with a situation where businesses have no effective protection against being badly treated by banks and their associates. Added to that, there is no real disincentive for banks and their associates to behave badly and even criminally towards those businesses, and nothing to stop the same banks and associates simply pulling the plug on them and hoovering up their assets to distribute among themselves. Businesses have nowhere—nowhere within their financial means, at any rate—to take their complaints about poor treatment that gives them a realistic chance of resolving their problems before their businesses and lives are consumed by them, or of receiving satisfactory compensation where they have suffered substantial loss or damage. On top of that, we repeatedly fail to take allegations of mistreatment and fraud seriously, and we refuse again and again to investigate and clamp down on bad and even criminal behaviour. Even on the rare occasions when we eventually investigate and prosecute, as in the case of HBOS Reading, we go after the foot soldiers, not the generals. It is not hard to see how that awful recipe of things combined to cause thousands of businesses to be devastated, their owners’ lives to be shattered and many jobs to be lost.

If we repeatedly fail to take allegations of mistreatment and fraud seriously, and we refuse again and again to investigate and clamp down on bad and criminal behaviour, there is no reason why such actions should ever stop occurring. I reinforce and second the questions the hon. Member for East Lothian asked, and I say to the Minister: please, for the sake of UK plc and the many businesses devastated by the issues I have tried to describe, let us take clear action to ensure that justice is served.

2.5 pm

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): This is the third or fourth debate in which I have spoken in support of people running SMEs who have been utterly shafted—that is not too strong a word—by some banks. It is clear that quite a few SMEs are being denied justice in their many financial services disputes. I am amazed that that has not been fixed by now.

I have spoken up for my constituent Dean D’Eye and his family and friends, who have been terrorised by insolvency professionals working for the Global Restructuring Group and Dunbar bank. Mr D’Eye had his life’s work taken away from him. He had a development company in south London with a value of £140 million, as well as a thriving youth hostel business that employed more than 100 people. He was robbed of them by banks working like pirates. It is simply appalling that they have been allowed to get away with it.

I will not repeat the D’Eye family’s experience, which is already on the record, but it is instrumental in guiding the way I look at this issue. How can it be that our entrepreneurs are so badly served by some banks? There should be a healthy, supportive relationship between them, but sometimes that loyalty goes only one way. Some banks—not of them—extort their SME customers in an incredibly predatory way. Some clearly have no humanity, no understanding and no common decency.

In the end, SMEs sometimes must take legal action against banks. Of course, they cannot match the legal armies banks put into the field against them. They simply do not have the resources, particularly as those very same banks have so often raided their accounts and taken moneys without their leave. We have a good—perhaps a great—justice system, but far too often SMEs simply do not have the money to access it.

I have read, and completely support and endorse the report by the co-chair of the all-party group on fair business banking, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). As suggested in the Hollinrake report—I do not think I am breaking the rules by calling it that—it is right and fair to extend to SMEs the right to take action under section 138D of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000.

As many people present realise, the only way for an SME to get independent resolution of a financial dispute is to complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service or seek legal redress. However, the Financial Ombudsman Service’s powers for SMEs are small and, as I have explained, taking a legal route can be extremely costly. In truth, the Financial Ombudsman Service is not set up to deal with SMEs. The system needs to be revisited and adapted so that it can deal with them.

There is also a gap right now between the Financial Ombudsman Service and the courts that needs to be sorted out. One way to do that, as the hon. Member for East Lothian mentioned, would be to establish a new financial services tribunal specifically to help protect and guide SMEs. That is also recommended in the Hollinrake report. I totally support that idea, as I think everyone in the Chamber does.

Martin Whitfield (East Lothian) (Lab): Just to confirm, there is discussion about extending the authority and powers of the Financial Ombudsman Service, but even then 30,000 SMEs would still fall outside of it. A tribunal would even out the battleground between them and the banks.

Bob Stewart: How long would it take to sort out 30,000 SMEs?

We are all clear about the importance of a thriving SME sector, run by entrepreneurs with leadership, drive and determination. Almost everyone who has spoken has mentioned it, and we all agree. It is up to us, as legislators, to ensure that such people—the lifeblood of the prosperity of our nation—are fully supported by a banking infrastructure designed to help them, not screw them. In far too many instances that does not happen, and it is utterly disgraceful. It must be sorted out. Please, God, can Parliament sort it out?

I have the utmost respect and regard for the Minister, who is an incredibly good friend. I hope he can get his officials cracking to sort out this matter with immediate effect, because it is a bloody national disgrace.

2.12 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham...
[Kevin Hollinrake]

(Bob Stewart) for his kind words. Although it is nice to have a report with my name on the front, it was written with co-operation and contributions from many people in the all-party group and outside it. It is wonderful to be associated with such an effective group, which has been one of the key bodies responsible for today’s debate. We would not be here without the all-party group. I have been associated with it for only a few short months, so I pay tribute to the many people who came before me. I thank the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for sponsoring today’s debate and for their superb contributions, which set out clearly the banking failures and abuses.

I have been lucky to have had the opportunity to start and build a business over 25 years, starting from small beginnings and building it into a large national organisation. I could not have done that without the support of banks, who in the main provide a good, vital service to businesspeople across the UK.

Businesses will often try to bend or break the rules—it is part of the entrepreneur’s DNA. Sometimes this can have a positive effect: creative destruction that finds new, more effective and cheaper ways of doing things that benefit consumers. Rule breakers such as Uber and Amazon present constant challenges to rule makers as regulations have to play catch-up to deal with new and better ways of working. However, sometimes breaking the rules can be very bad, particularly when they are broken so badly and with such immorality by those within an effective UK banking oligopoly of banks that are too big to fail, too big to sue and apparently too big to regulate.

In the last 10 years, particularly at Lloyds-HBOS and RBS, we have witnessed the most disgraceful, shameful episode in British banking’s 500-year history. Despite persistent and strenuous denials, those banks broke the rules to such an extent that they have been found guilty respectively of fraud and systematic mistreatment of their own business customers, which has led to the destruction of thousands of jobs, businesses and lives. In business, business is one’s life—it is not just about money. Those banks not only denied wrongdoing but used all the money, influence and power at their disposal to shut down and discredit anyone who tried to draw attention to their malpractice.

In 2013, Yorkshire businessman Lawrence Tomlinson, then the entrepreneur in residence at the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, was the first to discover and report on the abuses of thousands of SMEs at RBS and its notorious restructuring division, GRG. Incredibly, its response to his report was to withdraw banking facilities to its extensive business empire—he was an RBS customer—putting thousands of jobs at his enterprises at risk. It even tried to convince its Coutts subsidiary to withdraw the mortgage on his home.

It is individuals such as Mr Tomlinson, Paul and Nikki Turner—they are in the Public Gallery—and my constituents, the Welsbys, as well as journalists and those involved in the all-party group, who have brought abuses to light, not our regulator. Why should it be down to individuals to hold these people to account? We are also grateful to some eminent people in the legal world, including the former Master of the Rolls, Lord Dyson, and barristers Richard Samuel and Jeff Golden, for their support in drafting the report, which gives it so much credibility.

Two months after the Tomlinson review, the banking regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority, commissioned a full “skilled persons” report, which was completed in September 2016. It decided not to publish the report, at least in part—according to leaked minutes of the board meeting—because of concerns that it might be taken to court by RBS. Instead, 12 months later, it published a summary of the report, which inexplicably reversed the principal emphasis from demonstrating “widespread inappropriate treatment” to “isolated examples of poor practice.”

How can that be?

Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. With 90% of our business lending under the control of our big four banks, it is vital that our regulators hold this oligarchy to account. Yet, despite the banks’ chequered history of deception and denial, they are still allowed by the FCA to carry out their own internal compensation schemes and inquiries. There is little sign of action from the regulators or our fraud or crime agencies. Our regulators should be fearless protectors of banking customers and consumers, but actually they appear to be defenders of the banking faithful.

There was an interesting conversation at our launch last night. One of our officers spoke to one of the senior executives at Lloyds about our work—we are determined to call a spade a spade—who said, “Well, our good will towards you is wearing a little thin.” Our regulators, our Members of Parliament and our Ministers do not require Lloyds-HBOS’s good will to hold it to account.

The “Project Lord Turnbull” report, which the APPG published recently, makes serious allegations of fraud and cover-up against senior directors of Lloyds and HBOS. Those allegations must be investigated. I will name those people again: Andy Hornby, the chief executive; Sir Dennis Stevenson, the former chairman; James Crosby; Peter Cummings; Sir Ron Garrick; Mike Ellis; Peter Hickman; Hugh McMillan; Stewart Livingston; Ian Goodchild; Steven Clark; Andrew Scott and Tom Angus.

Those people must be questioned and investigated, as must those connected with those crimes, such as Rory McAlpine, the solicitor for the board of HBOS and Lloyds Banking Group, who was repeatedly sent evidence of the fraud by Paul and Nikki Turner, and even confirmed to the Turner in writing that if their allegations were confirmed, that would amount to criminal conduct. He attended, I believe, six of the Turners’ 22 eviction hearings in the Cambridge county court—an odd venue, one might think, for the deputy chairman of one of the UK’s largest law firms. His comments in the Turnbull report show a surprising level of antagonism toward the Turners and also, potentially, a surprising disregard for the law.

There are also individuals such as David Crawshaw of KPMG, who was the reliable insolvency practitioner to Lynden Scourfield, one of the people found guilty of the HBOS fraud. These people must be investigated—

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Member when he is speaking, but I want to be assured that none of the cases he is discussing is live. They are not sub judice, are they?
Kevin Hollinrake: Mr Bone, you make a fair point, but the report is in public circulation and has been for some time; this is nothing that you cannot read in public record on the internet.

The skilled persons report into RBS/GRG clearly refers to the abuses resulting from the priorities GRG pursued. That can only mean those in senior executive roles within that organisation: Derek Sach, Chris Sullivan and Nathan Bostock. To go back to your point, Mr Bone, I hope they are live cases and these people are being investigated, but the lack of evidence of any interrogation of these facts is the thing that most concerns us. The victims of the abuses must be questioned, at the very least, by our authorities, and if evidence of guilt can be established, prosecutions must follow. To our knowledge, no such questioning of victims has taken place. We need justice for the individuals who have been wronged, but we also need justice to ensure that those who are ultimately responsible are held to account.

Our major banks are so large and complex that I am sceptical that we will ever be able to regulate them effectively. As well as trying to stop these abuses from happening, therefore, we need a mechanism that offers redress to those abused when they do. The proposed solution of expanding the Financial Ombudsman Scheme is welcome, but will still leave many without access to justice. The FOS is an alternative dispute resolution mechanism; it cannot compel the release of evidence or attendance of witnesses, and judgments are made in private, so the guilty avoid scrutiny. The primary dispute resolution mechanism is the court, but who can afford to sue a bank?

The simple solution that we propose is to establish a financial services tribunal, as detailed by hon. Members on either side of the House, which would emulate the operation of employment tribunals so that the plaintiff does not have to stand the cost of the defendant's legal fees even if they lose. If we give businesspeople confidence that they will be treated fairly if things go wrong, we can not only provide justice to those who have been wronged, but reverse the five-year decline in confidence and new borrowing from our banks and, crucially, deliver a timely boost to the UK economy.

2.24 pm

Drew Hendry (Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Bone. I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) and the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) on securing this important debate. I am delighted to speak for the Scottish National party and I share almost all the concerns that have been raised so far. I say almost, because I have a few more direct criticisms of the UK Government and what they could have done and should do in the future, but I will come to those in due course.

What I think we would find in common among those who have looked into the practices of the rogue banking sector is the palpable anger about the treatment of people who have found themselves in grossly unfair situations. The hon. Member for East Lothian started off by talking about the drive for high standards in the industry; there is a drive among some people who are committed to achieving that, but that drive must be reflected among those in positions of power. He pointed out the absolute failure to support small businesses, particularly given the percentage—99.9%—of businesses and the £1.8 trillion figure that he outlined. I do not think it is often explained to a wider audience just how big and important the sector is, and it is vital across the nations of the UK.

The hon. Gentleman also made the point that trust in the banking sector has never been lower, and unfortunately I think that is the case. I say unfortunately, because I want to talk about the good parts of banking later on, but he is absolutely right. There is such a wide range of factors involved in the situation, and of course in the Scottish context the issue is quite disproportionate. I agree with his comment on that.

Bob Stewart: We are talking of trust. We are talking of despair—utter despair—in people. The despair with the banking sector is so great that that despair will be translated towards politicians unless we sort this out and help entrepreneurs. They have a right to expect us, as politicians, to sort this. Where else can they go but to us?

Drew Hendry: In typical passionate fashion, the hon. Gentleman makes a strong point. He is right that more politicians should be angry about this, and not just the hon. Members in this room or in the debates we have had recently in the Chamber. This is a critical matter that many more hon. Members should be focused on and concerned about. The hon. Member for East Lothian talked about the Government's role, and I will come on to agree with some of the things he said and add my own comments. The disgrace of the Global Restructuring Group, which has been well rehearsed many times, is a vicious application of sharp practice by the GRG—although there were others, of course, and it was not alone in that.

The hon. Gentleman talked eloquently about the lost businesses, marriages and homes, and the people who have been stripped of their dignity and, in some cases, even pushed toward suicide. He made some positive proposals for the legal rights of SMEs, which were repeated by other hon. Members. He also said, telling—this is important for people—that the victims are not going away. This is not going to disappear just because the banks want it to; it will continue to be brought up.

The hon. Member for Stirling talked about entrepreneurs, and he is right. Entrepreneurs are important around the nations of the UK as those who take the risks—that is what it means. Anybody who has been in business knows that entrepreneurs often have to take risks that go beyond the norm, putting houses and property on the line, and in certain circumstances putting their family on the line—as we have heard in the context of the unfortunate outcomes—to take opportunities in business. He talked about fostering energy and ambition, which is exactly what banking should do. In some cases it does, and I will come back to some of that later, but I agree that it has proved to be frighteningly easy to erode businesses through technical breaches. That has been one of the biggest complaints.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the sneaky practice of banks using insolvency practitioners to do their dirty work. He spoke about RBS GRG's asset stripping and loading up on the profits from that, as well as its brutal application by RBS and other banks. We can all pinpoint
a constituent who has been hammered by these things, and the hon. Gentleman spoke eloquently about his constituent John’s business being stolen from him. A common theme from all the contributions was the health effects on such people, including stress, anxiety and even heart problems, with families being almost torn apart. Similar to the line about victims not going away—I mean that in a positive way—he talked about the human cost, and he asked the Minister directly for clear action to ensure that justice is served. I will come back with some asks for the Minister as well.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) spoke passionately, and rightly so. I do not say that in a glib way; he is right to be passionate and outspoken. He talked about people being terrorised by GRG and Dunbar bank, about people’s life’s work being taken away from them and the fact that there is one-way loyalty. Isn’t that true? In all of the cases we have heard about, that has been the situation—it has been a one-way street. Some of the banks have been predatory; there is no other way to put it.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about small and medium-sized enterprises being unable to match the legal armies of the banks. That is a vital observation, because after the banks carried out this sharp practice—we do not know, but some may still be doing some of this without it coming to light—there was no real recourse. People do not have the ability to tackle it. By the nature of the problem, they do not have the money to access the rights for action. He pointed out that the Financial Ombudsman Service, as it sits, is not fit for purpose for SMEs. The hon. Gentleman said that small business is the life and blood of his nation, and I think that is even more acute in Scotland, where small businesses are even more central to the economy, as was mentioned.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) for his work. He made a point that I want to stress: banks provide vital services for businesses. When we criticise the people working in the banks, we talk about a fairly small number of key decision makers. We must appreciate that an army of people work in the banks who are good, hard-working, dedicated and honest people of great integrity who help people in their communities and in the wider business sector. I know that there is agreement around the room on that, but it is important to underline it.

As I said, banks provide vital services. When banks operate in the way they should, it is fantastic. When they operate in the ways we have seen, particularly with some of the decisions made at a corporate level over the past few years, it is absolutely destructive and no good at all.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point about people working in those banks who have integrity. Through our work on the all-party parliamentary group, we met people at a senior level who were appalled at what happened within GRG. The second phase of the FCA investigation should now take place, to name individuals and find out who was ultimately responsible. However, it is not apparent that a thorough investigation and questioning of such people, who could provide evidence on exactly what happened, is taking place. It needs be shown that it is.

Drew Hendry: The hon. Gentleman has highlighted that fact, and I think we all agree with him.

The other comments made by the hon. Gentleman are worthy of highlighting. He talked about the banks being too big to fail, sue or regulate; well, isn’t that the case? We have seen that over recent years. He talked about how reports can suddenly change from saying that there are widespread problems to there being only isolated examples. How come? He also talked about the FCA allowing banks to undertake internal inquiries and compensation schemes, which, again, seems completely incompatible with its role. The hon. Gentleman also said that regulators should be fearless defenders, not complicit in allowing these practices to happen. I thank him for his comments.

Martin Whitfield: I take the opportunity to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, who worked with the APPG on the forerunner to this report. I am sure that this is the case, but does the Scottish National party agree on the need for a financial transactions tribunal along the lines of employment tribunals, which carry so much public confidence?

Drew Hendry: There is a need to tackle that. I will come on to exactly what my party proposes, which I think the hon. Gentleman will find favour with.

I do not want to lose the words of the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton, who said—this is not a direct quote; I hope he will forgive me—that Ministers do not require the good will of the banks to hold them to account. That is important. Finally, he talked about the major banks being so large and complex that it seems impossible to rein them in. He mentioned a solution being a financial services tribunal, so that plaintiffs do not face a cost, win or lose. We have to consider that.

I understand that there is a bit of time left, so if it finds favour with hon. Members I will make a few more comments. I wanted to talk about all these issues, but I will start with the impact of some of the decisions made by the banks on local communities. People in rural areas have been hit by the closure of their banking services. My constituency alone has seen branches close in Inverness, Nairn, Aviemore and Grantown-on-Spey.

I was sent an appeal by the Badenoich and Strathspey Disability Access Panel. Its members felt so strongly that they got together to send their concerns. They wanted to communicate their concerns to Members about the adverse impact of bank closures on rural communities generally, and on the disabled members of those communities. They said:

“Recently the Royal Bank has closed its branches in Aviemore and Grantown, and the Bank of Scotland has closed its branch in Kingussie.”

For those unfamiliar with the geography of my constituency, those are quite disparate communities. Closing the branch in Grantown means that somebody wanting to access RBS services now has a round trip of more than an hour—in good weather—to Inverness to do so. They also say:

“Like the community in general, disabled people are very dissatisfied by the use of Mobile Banks, which offer only limited facilities for a few hours in the week. This causes problems of privacy, queuing (whatever the weather) and security, e.g. sums of money can build up between the visits of the bank and people are rightly worried about the safe keeping of them.”
They are worried about being seen in open queues as they go to mobile banks with piles of cash on them. Cash businesses often have to operate in rural economies. They also say:

“Disabled people have particular worries. The banks claim that Internet banking is a viable alternative, but many disabled people have no access to the internet. Furthermore, they find the option of having to undertake a return journey of between 20 and 30 miles (or more) to visit a proper bank distressing, because it either means depending on someone for transport or trying to use public transport, which is far from frequent in a rural community and which can be challenging to access for a person with a disability.”

Finally, the banks have failed in their duty of keeping customers informed. How accessible are the sites chosen for the vans, how accessible is entry into the van, what facilities for the disabled are available in the van, e.g. for deaf or visually impaired people, and how well trained are the staff in dealing with the needs of disabled people? It may be that the banks have made adequate provision, but there has been no attempt to communicate this to disabled customers, who may be deterred from making use of the mobile bank. Incidentally, there has been an occasion when the mobile bank did not appear because of mechanical failure, but there was no system in place for the public to know what was happening."

They were waiting in the cold for something that would turn up, without communication.

The disability access panel said of one customer that she uses a stick and walking from her house to the bank is a “big undertaking”. No seats are provided for people who are waiting, “so she had to stand outside, which was difficult. The steps were very high—they did help her up the stairs but she doesn’t think she could do this every week. She asked for bank statements and was told they couldn’t do it...she would have to go to Inverness.”

They could only offer her the balance, just like at an ATM. The panel continues:

“She gave them feedback but they only noted it down on a bit of paper, she didn’t feel they took her complaint seriously.”

All I have had from RBS in response is that it has forwarded some information about the current situation. It is looking for a coach builder; it has not found one yet, but in the short term it is using a system called MyHailo, so customers will have a job that they can press to get a member of staff from the van to come out. That answers very few of the criticisms that were made.

It is a disgrace that, despite being a 70% shareholder in the bank, the Government have failed to use their influence to represent Scottish communities and reverse devastating branch closures. The public bailed out the Royal Bank of Scotland; it cannot repay communities through the closures, but the amounts of money involved are minuscule in the context of the bank’s operations, and the damage that the closures are causing, if that were to be quantified—I am sure that it would have to be somehow—would be far greater than a few million pounds. The Royal Bank of Scotland must accept that it has a social responsibility that goes beyond mere pounds, shillings and pence.

Drew Hendry: This is becoming a habit, but I completely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I have cut my notes a wee bit shorter, but the point I was going to make was exactly that: the sell-off of assets does not make any financial sense in the longer term. If we believe that the vans are going to stay—that requires a stretch of the imagination—they still have to employ people and incur costs. When we hear figures of x million pounds, that sounds like a lot of money to some people, and in some contexts it is a lot of money, but in terms of the scale of the bank, it is a tiny drop in the ocean, so again, I agree with the hon. Gentleman.

As I said, I will turn to the treatment meted out by RBS’s Global Restructuring Group. In the aftermath of the financial crisis, it behaved in a completely unacceptable and disgraceful manner. I concur with hon. Members that it is also a disgrace that the UK authorities have failed to intervene. Following the credit crunch, GRG took control of 16,000 SME customers with £65 billion of assets in Project Dash for Cash. Following allegations of malfeasance, GRG was reportedly disbanded in August 2014. More than 12,000 companies were pushed into the bank’s controversial “turnaround” division; and between 2007 and 2012, the value of loans to customers in GRG increased fivefold to more than £65 billion. With the threat of foreclosure of loans, the banks seized control of customer assets cheaply from businesses that they claimed were failing even though they had not defaulted on any loan repayments.

When we state the situation as simply as that, we wonder how it can be the case, yet as we have heard, time and again it was, and I have said this before in the main Chamber and other debates, but it is absolutely shocking that bank managers were able to increase their bonuses by identifying customers who could be squeezed...
in what RBS itself, in a 2008 email, called “Project Dash for Cash”. The leaked document disclosed that the taxpayers’ bank ran down businesses as part of a premeditated strategy to cut lending and bolster profits. People should be in jail for doing that.

RBS is not alone in being embroiled in this scandal. Several other banks, including Clydesdale, were caught in similar scandals.

Kevin Hollinrake: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point about the financial interest and financial benefit that some of the executives saw. He may be aware that Nathan Bostock, who was one of the senior executives at GRG and is now at Santander, where I understand he earns £4.6 million a year, is still getting a bonus from RBS—in terms of deferred bonuses—of £1.8 million this year. Despite what has happened at GRG and the fact that it came about as a result of the priorities of the management, that person still earns millions of pounds in the financial services industry.

Drew Hendry: That was a stunning intervention. This is not just about people getting away with it; it is about people being rewarded for it and continuing to be rewarded for it. In any other place, this would be a great national scandal, of huge proportions. The fact that not so many people know about it is still a real problem for the way we are operating across the nations of the UK.

As I said, RBS was not alone. Clydesdale bank was caught in similar scandals. National Australia bank, former parent to the Clydesdale and Yorkshire banks, will be forced to cover £406 million of PPI provision, under a divestment agreement. NAB was forced to save £1.7 billion for UK banking sector costs. Nearly 70,000 small firms, 8,372 of them Clydesdale bank customers, took out what were called tailored business loans, which means that they are not eligible for compensation.

The Tomlinson report had already shown the damning practices conducted by GRG, saying that it “artificially distresses an otherwise viable business”. The report stated:

“Once in this part of the bank, the business is trapped with no ability to move or opportunity to trade out of the position—they are forced to stand by and watch an otherwise successful business be sunk by the decisions of the bank.”

We have heard testimony on that from other hon. Members around the Chamber.

I could say a lot more; I have a lot more to say, but I am wary of my voice dragging on through the debate. I have considerably more to input, but I will move on to the Scottish National party’s point of view. We demand the UK Government create a permanent commercial financial dispute resolution platform to alleviate the situation for victims of mis-selling. We believe, as other hon. Members do, that the current system of commercial dealings with the regulator and litigation processes around mis-selling is, to say the least, inadequate. It is vital that every victim of mis-selling is given fair and equal access to justice.

We believe that asking the victims of mis-selling to take on the banks in court is not only immoral, but financially unworkable. The independent review process has been accused, as we have heard, of lacking in checks and balances. The role of the independent reviewer was to oversee cases, to ensure they are fair. Customers criticised the process, however, for the unaccountability of the reviewer, who would often fail to disclose the information that had been provided to them by the banks.

We call on the FCA and the UK Government to do all in their power to ensure that businesses, particularly small businesses, are informed about what they could be asked to sign up to and, critically, the consequences of doing so. It is time—the Minister has heard this from around the Chamber—for the UK Government and the FCA to step up to the plate to ensure that businesses get fair treatment and access to affordable justice.

The compensation scheme set up by RBS is simply not good enough. Given that many of the complaints were that sound businesses were being ruined, many company owners were also looking for compensation for consequential loss, rather than simply the fees they paid, which put them out of business. There is a separate consequential loss complaint scheme. By its nature, it is more complex and the calculation of loss is far more difficult. There are still questions, however, about the effectiveness of an ad hoc voluntary company compensation scheme.

We look to the UK Government to pick up where the FCA has failed and produce a comprehensive review into banking culture to ensure that history does not repeat itself for those customers. The SNP condemns the FCA’s decision to scrap its review on banking culture barely months after it was announced in 2015. It is vital that the Government take the necessary steps to ensure that the banking culture does not slip into pre-financial crash habits.

We fervently opposed the UK Government’s decision to scrap the reverse burden of proof, which had been recommended by the Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards, and call for it to be reinstated in legislation.

There are many other points I could make, but I want to draw my remarks to a conclusion so that others can speak. I want to underline the key points I have made. It is a disgrace that the UK Government have failed to use their influence from their 70% stake in RBS to represent Scottish communities and reverse the devastating branch closure programme. The Royal Bank of Scotland has failed to consult adequately on closing Scottish branches, with no clarity on the required performance of the 10 given a reprieve, which seem to be set up to fail. The treatment displayed by the Royal Bank of Scotland’s Global Restructuring Group to SMEs in the aftermath of the financial crisis was completely unacceptable. It is a disgrace that the UK authorities have failed to intervene.

The Government must now create a new, permanent commercial financial dispute resolution platform, to alleviate the suffering of victims of mis-selling. The UK Government must pick up where the FCA has failed and produce a comprehensive review into banking culture to ensure that history does not repeat itself. I add, as a parting shot, that leaving the European single market will also be disastrous for the financial services industry.
and the hon. Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for bringing this important matter for us to debate, discuss and tease out. I thank the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) for their comments. I thank, of course, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake), whose report set a good scene for us.

I want to briefly quote from that report. I know we do not have as much time as we would have if the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey had not taken up so much time, but I am not criticising that.

Mr Peter Bone (in the Chair): Order. That is not quite right. I think we have until 4.30 pm, so do not cut your remarks short because of that.

Peter Dowd: Okay. Thank you, Mr Bone. The report states:

“In the wake of the financial crisis, the banking sector’s reputation has suffered from a number of disturbing scandals, many of which have had a catastrophic effect on thousands of individual lives and livelihoods. They have also damaged confidence, resulting in reduced demand for business borrowing and, consequently, a slowing of economic growth.”

That encapsulates not just the context of those affected, but the broader sense of the economy.

This is not about bashing bankers. Other hon. Members have noted that many thousands of people work in the banking sector whose hands are clean regarding this. Let us not—we have not—go down the path of blaming everybody in the banking sector. My constituency has a large banking sector. Santander has a centre there with about 2,000 people. We all appreciate that it is not everybody in the banking sector.

Bob Stewart: It is about the morale of people who work for companies such as RBS. How could all those decent people, who are working really hard, want to be associated with these bloody criminals? They do not! It is really bad for their morale.

Peter Dowd: I think the hon. Gentleman should tell it as it is and stop holding back on these matters. Clearly, there is something rotten in the state of Denmark. The banking system appears, at times, to have fallen under the worst instincts of greed, instinct and, in some cases, a predatory capitalism, which others have alluded to.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Government bailing out the banks at the height of the financial crisis. In October 2008, the then Chancellor, Alistair Darling, announced £17 billion and, subsequently, £20 billion-worth of recapitalisation funds for Lloyds and RBS respectively. At the height of the crisis, taxpayers—everybody here and people in the Public Gallery—paid out of their own pockets, in one fashion or another, to the tune of £1.5 trillion. That is an awful lot of cash to come out of people’s pockets.

It is worth remembering that it was the ineptitude, at least, of certain bankers and the greed of others—not, I must say, a Labour Government—that trashed the global economy; leading to the UK financial sector receiving the largest taxpayer-funded bailout in history. That narrative has given many people a “Get out of jail” card. Blaming the last Labour Government is not helpful, because it takes attention away from the real culprits.

The taxpayers who funded the bailout of RBS and Lloyds have since found themselves rewarded by the Government, with the deepest cuts to public services. That has to be said, because it is a consequence of the banking crisis, too. There are consequences for individual businesses, for small and medium enterprises, but there are also consequences of that greed that we all—in one fashion or another, whether it is our brothers, sisters or parents—suffered. Let us not forget that, nor self-flagellate on this matter.

I have to tell the Minister, it is an inconvenient truth that the Chancellor has sold off taxpayers’ shares in Lloyds and part of our shares in RBS. According to the National Audit Office, the Government sold shares in Lloyds at a loss of £5.9 billion. The recent sale of 925 million shares in RBS left taxpayers with a £2.1 billion loss. That is a total of £8 billion taken out of the pockets of taxpayers and of small and medium enterprises. That money could have been used for compensation and redress. That is the fact of the matter. We should not be selling these things off when people are already queuing up to get back some of the money that was inappropriately taken from them; that is the context.

I turn now to the failures of the banking sector since the financial crisis. Several Members used their speeches to express concerns, for example about the number of banks closing in the high street, and those closures are happening despite the Government introducing the access to banking protocol to prevent closures. This issue about trust and confidence continues; we must have trust and confidence in our banks.

In 2015, the four big banks made £11 billion in profits from high street banking. It is clear that they are in a position to provide these vital services and curtail closures, which are contributing further to the decline of our high streets and leaving communities all over the country financially excluded. We were there for the banks when they messed up and they must be here for us in our communities now. We helped them and they have got to help us and our communities.

The next Labour Government are committed to ensuring that banks provide the financial infrastructure that businesses and communities need, and we will replace the access to banking protocol with alternative legal requirements. My hon. Friend the Member for East Lothian referred to those alternative legal requirements and he also raised the issue, as did others, of the Global Restructuring Group. It is worth my making a comment on that issue, too.

Apparently—indeed, evidently—the GRG was originally set up to support businesses that were in trouble and bring them back to financial health; apparently that was its original raison d’être. And where that was not possible, the GRG would manage the cessation of a business to protect the bank’s interests. There is nothing wrong with protecting the interests of a bank, if it is done reasonably, fairly and through the proper channels, and not with a predatory approach. However, thousands of small and medium businesses, many of which had been viable in the medium or long term, were put into the GRG and little attempt was made to help them. That has become apparent and these banks have got to recognise that that was the case.

I think the Tomlinson report has been referred to already today. It examined numerous cases of businesses consigned to the GRG and found very few examples of
a business entering the GRG and then moving back out and into local management. It was a one-way street; it was a cul-de-sac for those businesses.

The Tomlinson report recorded strong evidence of RBS extracting “maximum revenue from the business, beyond what can be considered reasonable and to such an extent that it is the key contributing factor to the business’ financial deterioration.”

So, the people who it was thought would help a business did not just fail to help it; they actually gave it a good kicking. That is the fact of the matter for many, many businesses. As I said, the very people who were expected to help save businesses did the opposite.

Of course, in their speeches today Members have cited a number of specific cases of businesses in their constituencies that were victims of this scheme, and “victims” is not too strong a word to use, because they were victims. There are heart-rending, heartbreaking stories of people that Members have brought to us today, and in our constituencies we have all encountered such cases, so these incidents are not isolated incidents.

All of that has meant that in certain situations the GRG effectively intervened in the valuation of assets, as has been indicated already today, triggered default and then took advantage of the consequences. Some businesses saw as much as a two-thirds reduction in their valuation in just two months. I repeat that—some businesses saw as much as a two-thirds reduction in their valuation in just two months.

I am aware that a complaints process is still ongoing between the RBS and its former business customers, and the victims of the GRG, as well as discussions about compensation. As I have said, many of us have been involved, to some degree or other, in this process. So I echo the calls made by hon. Members today and by my hon. Friends the Members for Norwich South (Clive Lewis), for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) and for Stalybridge and Hyde (Jonathan Reynolds) in previous debates that this issue demands a full and independent public inquiry. Given the revelations in the Financial Conduct Authority’s section 166 report, there must be a comprehensive examination of all matters that could have led to practices that, at the very least, bordered on being illegal or were illegal. I know that the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton was more robust in his approach to this issue than I have been, but I understand his sentiments.

The reality is that the Government’s response to what amounts to a scandal has been woeful at best, particularly when we consider the seriousness of the reports on this issue. Over the past decade, the relationships between banks and their customers have been damaged by a series of high-profile incidents. Business banking scandals, record fines and the closure of high street banks across the country have placed an insurmountable amount of pressure on this relationship.

The hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton says that one bank in particular is getting a bit tired of these pressures on this relationship.

The hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) referred to help save businesses did the opposite.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Hanson. I start by acknowledging the work of the all-party group and by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) and the hon. Member for East Lothian (Martin Whitfield) who secured this important debate. Members have spoken with conviction and passion about some banks behaving in an appalling fashion. I recognise that there are outstanding cases that have not been resolved to the satisfaction of their constituents. I will address some of the issues that need resolution by Government in my later remarks. First, I want to examine specific points raised by Members and then I shall go through what I have done since the previous debate and what I see happening to try to address the work of the APPG. Hopefully, that will give the House some clarity today.

The hon. Members for East Lothian and for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey (Drew Hendry) referred to help save businesses did the opposite.

I give a commitment from the Labour party that if the Government want to set aside legislative time to put that tribunal into the system, they will have our full backing to do that, because we must take action now—not tomorrow, next week or next year. We must take action now.

So I make an offer to the Minister today, to help restore trust in the banking system. Yes, let us have a tribunal system; let us have a dispute resolution system; and let us have access to all those things. However, let us also have a tribunal system that we can all trust and believe in.

I give a commitment from the Labour party that if the Government want to set aside legislative time to put that tribunal into the system, they will have our full backing to do that, because we must take action now—not tomorrow, next week or next year. We must take action now.
Drew Hendry: The Minister mentions commercial issues for the banks, but surely ownership of the bank, certainly such a large majority ownership, plays some part in the commercial process. Would it not have been correct for the UK Government to use the fact that they largely own the bank to make a decision to protect the people it is supposed to serve?

John Glen: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, but I will take the opportunity to correct him. The Government do not have a 70% shareholding. We have a 62.4% shareholding. We do not have control of the day-to-day running of the bank, in the same way as the Scottish Government do not have control of Prestwick Glasgow Airport, yet they have a complete shareholding in it. We need to be real. There is a difference between ownership and day-to-day control. I want to address the practical issues because our constituents want to know what is being done to deal with these challenges. Before I go into that, I want to acknowledge that in previous debates I was challenged by Members from constituencies in Scotland. I will visit Scotland for four or five days at the end of August during the recess to address specifically the issues around rural banking. I went to look at the mobile banking units of one of the banks in Derbyshire in the previous recess, and I take very seriously the concerns about how effectively they function in terms of support for disabled people.

Peter Dowd: What sort of message does it send to banks when all these closures are happening and in 2016 the Government decide to cut, for example, the banking levy from £3 billion to £1.3 billion, sequentially, year on year? The Minister can try to duck the issue, but he gives a bung to the banks while they close their branches, and that is not acceptable.

John Glen: I want to try to address our constituents’ concerns about bank closures and what the Government are doing to see that their services are provided. The Post Office and the banking industry have a commercial agreement that enables 99% of the UK’s personal and 95% of the UK’s business customers to carry out their day-to-day banking. I am concerned about the effectiveness of that arrangement, so I am determined that public awareness of those services should be greater. I am pleased that UK Finance and the Post Office have responded to my call for further action, particularly when the last bank in town closes, to make sure that the transfer of responsibility—

Drew Hendry: Will the Minister give way?

John Glen: I will not keep giving way—I need to finish what I am saying. I will give way in a moment. Let me just finish this point.

The Government also support the industry’s access to banking standards, overseen by the independent Lending Standards Board, which commits banks to better communicate with customers and those who need more help when a bank closes. I am not seeking to duck any issue and I look forward to further engagement on this matter.

Drew Hendry: I appreciate the Minister’s giving way, and I appreciate that the issue is sensitive for many of us in rural constituencies. If the position is that the UK Government do not brook any interference or intervening in commercial decisions, how can it be the case that the Minister is listing a number of interventions that he is about to make in a commercial situation?

John Glen: I was making it clear that, as a Minister, I do not make the operational day-to-day decisions about which individual branches should close. My responsibility is to see that consumers have access to the services they need, and I have done that through brokering the arrangement between UK Finance, which represents the banks, and the Post Office, which provides services when closures take place.

The hon. Member for East Lothian mentioned insolvency practitioners.

Kevin Hollinrake: The Minister is being very generous in giving way. He talks about the issues around bank closures. One of the things that banks are doing to substitute for bank availability is moving us all online, so we are transacting more online through apps and the like. Colleagues have written on behalf of constituents to the all-party group to tell us about authorised payments and online fraud. Yet the banks themselves and the Financial Ombudsman Service are attributing gross negligence to the customer, despite the fact that they have gone to some lengths to try to prevent fraud. For example, the person on the other end of the phone knows their password, their maiden name—a degree of information that would not make that giving away of information gross negligence, yet they are being disadvantaged, despite the fact that the banks have pushed them online.

John Glen: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. The Payment Systems Regulator is doing a live piece of work to look at scamming and will report in September. It looks very much at culpability in such cases and I hope it will come up with a clear resolution that will give the public a better understanding.

If I may, given the luxury of additional time, Mr Hanson, I am going to try and reply to the points raised and then I will come on to substantive points. Insolvency practitioners are regulated by one of five recognised professional bodies. Legislation in 2015 introduced binding statutory objectives on these bodies, and the Insolvency Service has more sanctions available to it to deter and deal with poor conduct or performance. The insolvency code of ethics, raised through the Joint Insolvency Committee, is also expected to be revised and updated later this year, but I will be happy to enter into dialogue with the hon. Member for East Lothian about the specific issues and concerns that he has.

Martin Whitfield: On that point, does the Minister accept that there is an inherent conflict of interest in the situation whereby we have a bank, what I will call a limited company, and individual shareholders? We have the bank instructing the professionals who then deal with the company, and that less than virtuous circle leads to an almost inherent conflict of interest for professional groups: the lawyers, the accountants and the insolvency practitioners.

John Glen: I am happy to look carefully at the issues and the respective responsibilities and interaction between them that the hon. Gentleman raises. I fully accept the sensible point he makes.
[John Glen]

I want to return to the case raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling. Several specific cases were raised and my hon. Friend spoke passionately about his constituent’s case, which is illustrative of many of the experiences that sadly occur. Following my meeting, I received a letter from Ross McEwan in May that said that his complaints handling team would be happy to discuss constituency cases with Members. I encourage all Members to do so. I want to put this on the record. I particularly encourage my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling to raise his constituency case with the team. I am keen to understand what sort of response he gets and how satisfactory the process is.

As to the comments of the hon. Member for Bootle (Peter Dowd) about the sale of RBS shares, I am not one to enter into unnecessary partisanship in such discussions, because the issues are important, and I generally welcome the tone of the debate, but he must acknowledge that when the shares were purchased by the Government for £5.02 in 2008 it was not a rational economic choice. It was necessary for the Brown Government to secure the banking system. Therefore, to point out the difference in price, after the Government had taken advice from those who are stewards of the Government’s interest, based on value for money, is not really rational. Most consumers would not have purchased shares at the time in question; it was for the good of the nation.

Peter Dowd: Okay, so if we push the bank aside and forget that, how does the Minister explain the loss to the taxpayer in the sale of the Post Office, which was based on value for money, is not really rational. Most people in the Gallery cannot get a penny out of the Government?

John Glen: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has conceded the point on RBS. I want to focus on banks, and I was responding specifically on the matter of RBS.

I want to set out what the Government have done to address the issues that came to the fore during the financial crisis, because the regulatory framework and what has evolved over the past 10 years is a foundation for some of the outstanding challenges that we need to resolve. Since the crisis, the Government have reformed the UK system of financial regulation for the benefit of the industry and the people who rely on it. We have bolstered standards across the sector and taken strides to restore public trust in financial services. I acknowledge that there is more work to be done, and I shall come specifically to the issues raised in the report of the all-party group, and in other work. We have regulators armed with comprehensive powers and responsibilities co-operating to identify and address risks across the financial sector. The Financial Stability Board has praised the UK for its successful transition to a new regulatory regime, and the International Monetary Fund has applauded the UK’s more resilient system. We have implemented reforms to improve individual accountability in the financial services sector, and that includes the introduction of the senior managers and certification regime, which promotes individual responsibility.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) set out a list of individuals about whom he has outstanding concerns; and it must be right to hold people to account. Where evidence exists for individuals having behaved criminally or in a way that needs further analysis, it must be brought forward. I understand that the shadow cast over the issue by outstanding cases needs to be resolved by the regulator. However, the SMCR promotes individual responsibility, holding senior managers to account for misconduct that occurs on their watch. It ensures that individuals at all levels can be held to appropriate standards of conduct. Both those things were key recommendations of the post-crisis Parliamentary Commission on Banking Standards. The SMCR was implemented for all banks, building societies, credit unions and Prudential Regulation Authority-designated investment firms in 2016. The regime will be extended to cover insurance firms from December 2018, and all other Financial Conduct Authority-regulated firms in December 2019.

I want now to talk about the core issue of SME lending. Despite significant improvements to the system at large, I am acutely aware that concerns remain about misconduct within the sector.

Kevin Hollinrake: The senior managers regime is important, but it will not be effective unless the regulators or law enforcement agencies investigate, speak to victims, find out exactly what has gone on, establish the evidence and take prosecutions forward where guilt is demonstrated.

John Glen: I agree, and will discuss the implications of that.

Many of the concerns that are raised relate to small businesses—sometimes microbusinesses, and sometimes individuals who have been working hard, with a perfectly solid relationship with their bank. Those businesses form the backbone of our economy, as several hon. Members have said this afternoon, and there has been justified anger, both within Parliament and beyond, about Global Restructuring Group at RBS, HBOS Reading and the mis-selling of interest rate hedging products. The case of GRG, and other cases from the crisis period, are unacceptable and I will continue to push for action. I shall explain what is happening.

I mentioned at the Backbench Business debate in May that the chief executive of RBS had committed to modifying the GRG compensation scheme. RBS will set up an independent appeal process for consequential loss claims. I acknowledge that the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey mentioned that in his speech. I shall discuss with Sir William Blackburne how that process will operate when we meet next week. I understand the concerns about the need for it to work effectively. As has been mentioned, the assessment of consequential loss is a tricky issue, and I need to be sure that the process will be expedited as well as possible.

Treasury officials receive regular updates from RBS on the compensation scheme, and I am glad that progress is being made on direct loss claims, with a further 200 complaints closed and a further £4 million paid out since the last debate in May.

Kevin Hollinrake: No one suggests that Sir William Blackburne at RBS or Professor Griggs at Lloyds are not decent people, trying to do the right thing. but is not the concern the fact that the compensation schemes are internal? It is not enough for justice to be done; it must be seen to be done.
John Glen: I am happy to keep taking interventions, but I am getting to the points that are raised. I would like some flow in what I am trying to say.

I remind hon. Members that what happened at HBOS Reading was criminal behaviour—beyond unacceptable. It is right and just that six people have been convicted, and that they are serving more than 47 years in prison. In March 2017, following the conclusion of the criminal investigation, Lloyds set aside £100 million for compensation payments to 64 victims, and Russel Griggs was hired to review individual cases. Professor Griggs’s recent letter to the Treasury Committee set out that 170 offers have been made to affected directors, ranging from less than £100,00 to more than £5 million. In addition, Lloyds Banking Group has appointed Dame Linda Dobbs as an independent legal expert to consider whether issues relating to HBOS Reading were investigated and appropriately reported to authorities at the time by Lloyds Banking Group, following its acquisition of HBOS.

The FCA continues to conduct investigations into both RBS GRG and HBOS Reading. It cannot be the case—I made this point when I met Andrew Bailey, the chief executive of the FCA—that we allow those institutions to arbitrate on outcomes when there are significant outstanding and unresolved issues. I was pleased to hear that the FCA is likely to conclude whether there is any basis for enforcement action in the matter of GRG by the end of this month, in line with the indication that I gave on 10 May. I look forward to the conclusion of that investigation and the investigation of misconduct at HBOS Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton and others were right to say that these matters will not go away. In a characteristically passionate speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) set the expectation that the matter should be resolved. I have been in this job for nearly seven months and have responded to three or four debates on the topic; I expect there will be more, because more needs to be done. We understand how important it is that SMEs have access to the dispute resolution with banks that they need.

I am glad that there are four pieces of work looking at that matter, as I mentioned at the report’s launch yesterday evening. The FCA is currently consulting on expanding its authority for the Financial Ombudsman Service. I acknowledge the points made and the concerns about resourcing and sufficiency in that regard; they will need to be addressed. Richard Lloyd is reporting today on his independent review into the workings of the Financial Ombudsman Service, which was stimulated by the excellent work of the journalists for “Dispatches”. That review includes several recommendations, and the FOS intends to publish an update on the progress made by the end of the year.

UK Finance is also reviewing the access of SMEs to dispute resolution. There is a lot of expectation that UK Finance, as the representative of the four big banks, will respond thoroughly to some—I hope, all—of those issues. We need to find binding and enduring solutions to the issues that have been raised. Last night, the APPG published its work into the options for an independent financial services dispute mechanism. Those four strands of work will come together in the autumn, and the Government will consider them in the round.

I also want to respond to the point raised by several hon. Members, in particular the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton, and say that the Government are determined to ensure that financial markets work effectively for SMEs and to enable competition in the market. Since the Government set up the Prudential Regulation Authority in 2013, it has authorised 16 new UK banks, but I acknowledge that those banks are nowhere near challenging the four biggest banks in scale and size. There is work to be done to examine how that can change, so there is greater competition in the sector.

On lending specifically, the British Business Bank’s programmes support more than £6.4 billion of finance to more than 70,000 smaller businesses through programmes such as the ENABLE guarantee, which encourages banks to increase their lending to SMEs by helping to reduce the amount of capital that banks are required to hold against such lending.

I acknowledge the work of the regulators in seeking to ensure that the banking system is stronger, safer, and better placed to support the wider economy than ever before. Some of the Government’s actions are leading to that outcome. I am aware, however, of the outstanding concerns that hon. Members have expressed. I look forward to responding publicly to the various pieces of work that address dispute resolution for SMEs in the autumn. Given that the report was published only yesterday, and that there are some significant ongoing parallel strands of work that are nearly completed, it is reasonable for me to wait to do so. I hope that will move the debate forward to a resolution that we and our constituents can have greater confidence in.

We need a banking sector in this country that enables lending, prosperity and growth in our economy, and when things go wrong we need to know that the resolution process will not be random, complicated and legally tortuous. Where we have legitimate examples of behaviour by banks that involves, or involved, malicious proactive interventions that were not justified on economic grounds, they need to be examined until they are resolved, so we can move forward with a more reliable system of regulating this vital sector of our economy.

3.33 pm

Martin Whitfield: I thank the Backbench Business Committee again for facilitating this debate. To pick up on the point about the anger that is felt across both sides of the House, the relatively small number of speakers in the debate in no way reflects the deep, passionate anger, annoyance and empathy that MPs feel for their constituents who have been victims. It is incredibly telling, and it is with huge respect, that we welcome so many people to the Public Gallery to witness this debate, which reflects one small part of this whole United Kingdom.

I thank the Minister for his thoughtful comments, and I extend an invitation to visit East Lothian and meet people who can give a different side, perhaps, of what suffering under the banks is like. The timetable that takes us to the autumn has been reiterated, and we will be back at that stage. The APPG’s excellent report proposes a tribunal, and puts on the table an option of facilitating primary legislation that could achieve that in the near future. That would be a significant step towards showing the public that we in this place understand their pain and have a proposal to put it right.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered failures in the banking sector.

3.35 pm

Sitting adjourned.
Written Statements

Monday 2 July 2018

TREASURY

Justice and Home Affairs Opt-in Decision

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The proposed EU directive on credit purchasers, credit servicers and the recovery of collateral contains, among other things, provisions on a new EU mechanism for out-of-court collateral enforcement. The directive is part of a broader package of EU measures designed to reduce the levels of non-performing loans (NPLs) in the EU, as NPLs decrease profitability of banks, often leaving them in a weak position from which to provide finance to the wider economy in support of growth and jobs.

The Government have decided that it is in the UK’s interest not to opt in to the Justice and Home Affairs obligations within this directive as the provisions introduce an unnecessary level of administration to the UK’s existing collateral enforcement mechanisms, which are sufficiently robust and fit for purpose.

The directive states that where member states establish collateral enforcement mechanisms “by means of appropriation”, the rights of creditors “shall be governed by the applicable laws in each member state”. The Government’s view is that this provision addresses situations in which conflicts of laws points arise, in which case it is an applicable law provision and therefore includes JHA content.

The directive similarly governs applicable law if a borrower and lender from two different EU member states cannot agree on the appointment of a valuer—with the appointment of the valuer falling on the court within one of those member states.

The Government remain supportive of the European Commission’s broader efforts to reduce levels of NPLs in the EU, supporting solutions that are proportionate and targeted.

DEFENCE

Grant in Kind

The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson): I have today laid before the House a departmental minute describing a package of equipment and infrastructure that the UK intends to provide to the Jordanian armed forces. The value of the package is estimated at £5,194,000.

The provision of equipment will be treated as a grant in kind. Following correspondence from the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee in 2016, Departments which previously treated these payments as gifts have undertaken to notify the House of Commons of any such grant in kind of a value exceeding £300,000 and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the grant until 14 parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The grant in kind in this case comprises working and accommodation buildings, furniture and physical training equipment. The granting of this equipment will support the Jordanian defence and borders programme and is fundamental to the aims of the Government strategy for Jordan. Delivery of targeted areas of equipment and infrastructure support is an integral part of the approach in order to assist Jordan in developing the capability to protect its borders. The activity is in support of the National Security Council objectives and is funded through the conflict, security and stability fund administered by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence.

Subject to completion of the departmental minute process, the equipment and infrastructure is expected to be delivered by the end of this financial year.

EDUCATION

Childcare Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): I wish to update the House on two important changes the Government are making to childcare.

I have today laid a new statutory instrument, the Childcare (Disqualification) Regulations and Childcare (Early Years Provision Free of Charge) (Extended Entitlement) (Amendment) Regulations 2018. This SI, which will come into force on 31 August 2018, makes important changes to improve the fairness of the childcare disqualification arrangements and extend 30 hours free childcare to children in foster care.

The childcare disqualification arrangements are an important part of the strong set of safeguards we have in place to ensure the safety and welfare of our children and young people. These arrangements apply exclusively to individuals working in childcare in schools and the private and voluntary sectors, up to and including reception classes, and in wraparound care for children up to the age of eight. These arrangements build on the safeguards provided by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) regime, which all schools and early years childcare providers must operate.

Under the arrangements, any individual who has committed an offence, or who is in breach of other criteria set out in legislation, is prohibited from working in these settings. The arrangements also include provision that disqualifies an individual from working in childcare because of an offence committed by someone who lives or works in their household, known as disqualification by association. This means that a member of staff is unable to work in childcare even though they themselves have not committed a relevant offence.

Disqualified individuals can obtain a waiver from Ofsted against their disqualification. Employers must suspend or redeploy the individual until a waiver is granted, as individuals who are disqualified cannot work in childcare without an Ofsted waiver. This provision has unfortunately been widely misunderstood and a number of individuals have been redeployed or suspended unnecessarily. Consequently, the disqualification by association provision is having a detrimental impact on employers and employees, as well as family life. It is also having a negative impact on the rehabilitation of offenders.

In response to widespread concerns about the disqualification by association provision, the Department for Education undertook a public consultation on options
for its reform. We were most grateful for the near 450 responses received. The responses to the consultation largely reiterated the earlier concerns. The consultation strongly favoured reform, and the majority of respondents advocated the removal of disqualification by association in non-domestic settings.

Making new regulations enables us to address these concerns, by removing the disqualification by association where childcare is provided in non-domestic settings, where other safeguarding measures are well observed and followed. The disqualification by association provision will however continue to apply where childcare is provided in domestic settings, where it provides an important safeguard.

We are supporting the changes we are making with new statutory guidance. This will reinforce existing messages about the importance of employers undertaking safer recruitment checks and provide them with advice on how they can manage their workforce in the absence of the disqualification by association component of the arrangements. The Department for Education will also continue to provide a helpline and mailbox to employers and employees to help them with the arrangements.

The Government are also extending 30 hours free childcare for three and four-year-olds to children in foster care. This is a key Government early years policy, and foster families should have access to the same support and opportunities that all families have.

This Government’s ambitions for children during and after being looked after are the same as for any other child: that they have access to good health and wellbeing, fulfil their educational potential, build and maintain lasting relationships and participate positively in society. The role of the foster parent is central to achieving these high ambitions for the children in their care. Fostering provides stability, a home and an alternative family. Children in foster care want to feel part of a family and have a normal family life. We need to support foster parents and local authorities in a way that achieves that. That includes fostering parents being able to work outside their caring responsibilities, where it is right for the child.

The SI I have laid today enables us to realise those ambitions, by allowing children in foster care to receive 30 hours free childcare where the following criteria are met:

That accessing the extended hours is consistent with the child’s care plan, placing the child at the centre of the process and decision making, and

that, in single parent families, the foster parent holds additional employment outside of their role as a foster parent; or

that in two parent families, both parents hold additional employment outside of their role as a foster parent.

The SI makes it clear that the eligibility of children in foster care will be determined by the responsible local authority.

We are supporting the changes with new statutory guidance and operational guidance. These will provide local authorities with detailed guidance on how they can discharge their duty to secure 30 hours free childcare for children in foster care, and ensure that the additional eligibility criteria are met.

Copies of the SI, our statutory and operational guidance documents, and the Government’s response to the consultation on changes to the childcare disqualification arrangements will be placed in the House Library.

[HCWS815]
Both Houses will have the opportunity to debate these regulations under the affirmative procedure. These regulations do not set separate maximum fees for accelerated degrees, which are still under consideration. I expect to confirm further details on accelerated degrees in due course.

I also expect to lay regulations setting student support arrangements for 2019-20 early in 2019 which will be subject to parliamentary scrutiny.

Maximum tuition fees and fee loans for approved (fee cap) providers in 2019-20

The maximum tuition fee for full-time courses will be £9,250 in 2019-20 for providers that are registered with the OfS in the approved (fee cap) category and have a current teaching excellence and student outcomes framework (TEF) award and an access and participation plan in place with the OfS. Lower maximum fee limits will apply for approved (fee cap) providers that do not have a TEF award or an OfS access and participation plan.

New students and eligible continuing students who started their full-time courses on or after 1 September 2012 will be able to apply for a fee loan to meet the full costs of their tuition up to a maximum of £9,250 in 2019-20 for full-time courses at approved (fee cap) providers.

The maximum tuition fee for students undertaking part-time courses at Approved (Fee Cap) providers that have a TEF award and have an OfS access and participation plan, will be £6,935 in 2019-20. Lower maximum fee limits will apply for Approved (Fee Cap) providers without a TEF award or an OfS access and participation plan.

New students and eligible continuing students who started their part-time courses on or after 1 September 2012 will be able to apply for a fee loan of up to a maximum of £6,935 to meet the full costs of their tuition in 2019-20 for part-time courses at approved (fee cap) providers.

Maximum fee loans for approved providers in 2019-20

New students and eligible continuing students who started their full-time courses on or after 1 September 2012 and are undertaking courses at approved providers in 2019-20 will not be subject to maximum fees in regulations. They will however be able to apply for fee loans towards the costs of their tuition.

The maximum fee loan for new students and eligible continuing students who started their full-time courses on or after 1 September 2012 will be £6,165 in 2019-20 for those undertaking full-time courses at approved providers that have a current TEF award or £6,000 without a TEF award.

The maximum fee loan for new students and eligible continuing students who started their part-time courses on or after 1 September 2012 will be £4,625 in 2019-20 for part-time courses at approved providers that have a current TEF award or £4,500 without a TEF award.

[HCWS816]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

GP Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): NHS Digital recently identified a supplier defect in the processing of historical patient objections to the sharing of their confidential health data. An error occurred when 150,000 type 2 objections[1] set between March 2015 and June 2018 in GP practices running TPP’s system were not sent to NHS Digital. As a result, these objections were not upheld by NHS Digital in its data disseminations between April 2016, when the NHS Digital process for enabling them to be upheld was introduced, and 26 June 2018. This means that data for these patients has been used in clinical audit and research that helps drive improvements in outcomes for patients.

Since being informed of the error by TPP, NHS Digital acted swiftly and it has now been rectified. NHS Digital made the Department of Health and Social Care aware of the error on 28 June. NHS Digital manages the contract for GP systems of choice on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care.

TPP has apologised unreservedly for its role in this matter and has committed to work with NHS Digital so that errors of this nature do not occur again. This will ensure that patients’ wishes on how their data is used are always respected and acted upon.

NHS Digital will write to all TPP GP practices today to make sure that they are aware of the issue and can provide reassurance to any affected patients. NHS Digital will also write to every affected patient. Patients need to take no action and their objections are now being upheld.

There is not, and has never been, any risk to patient care as a result of this error. NHS Digital has made the Information Commissioner’s Office and the National Data Guardian for Health and Care aware.

As part of our commitment to the secure and safe handling of health data, on 25 May 2018 the Government introduced the new national data opt-out. The national data opt-out replaces type 2 objections. This has simplified the process of registering an objection to data sharing for uses beyond an individual’s care. The new arrangements give patients direct control over setting their own preferences for the secondary use of their data and do not require the use of GP systems, and therefore will prevent a repeat of this kind of GP systems failure in the future.

The Government have the highest regard for data standards and are committed to ensuring patients can express a preference over how health data is shared for purposes beyond their own care.

Where individuals did not want NHS Digital to share confidential patient information that they had collected from across the health and care service for purposes other than the individuals care, they could register this preference, known as a type 2 opt-out.

[HCWS813]

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing Policy Update

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Since we published our Housing White Paper last year, we have been making significant progress in fixing the broken housing market, reforming our planning system and increasing housing
supply to start to improve affordability, as well as taking steps to ensure that communities have the safe and high-quality homes they need to thrive.

Our new national planning policy framework—coming into force this summer following our consultation—will transform the planning system, and of autumn Budget we set out £15 billion the new financial support for housing, taking our total investment to £44 billion over the next five years. Since 2010 we have delivered over a million new homes, and in 2016-17 we saw 217,350 new homes delivered—the highest number in all but one of the last 30 years.

Our new national housing agency, Homes England, is taking a more assertive approach to getting homes built. This has already started—for example in Burgess Hill, a site that is desperately needed for affordable housing but which sat undeveloped. Homes England has now stepped in, bought the land and is delivering the infrastructure. Today I am announcing a plan to build over 3,000 homes on the site.

But we need to go further, and in particular we recognise the housing market needs an injection of innovation and competition. Getting new players into the market and embracing modern methods of construction will allow us to build faster and drive up choice and quality for consumers.

To help do this, today I am announcing that the local authority accelerated construction programme is moving into its delivery phase. Through this fund, we are releasing £450 million to speed up delivery of homes on surplus local authority land and encouraging the use of modern methods of construction and SME builders. Homes England has started the process of funding negotiations with a number of local authorities to ensure their sites can deliver greater pace and innovation in house building.

But this is not just about the number of homes, it is also about ensuring we deliver the right homes in the right places, and building communities that people are happy to call home.

Today I am announcing that we have launched a new Homes England programme to deliver the community housing fund. Community groups and local authorities in all parts of England outside London are now able to apply for capital and revenue funding to bring community-led housing schemes forward. Homes England has published a prospectus on its website at: www.gov.uk/topic/housing/funding-programmes.

Through this fund, housing will be delivered where the mainstream market is unable to deliver. The housing it helps provide will be tailored to meet specific local needs and will remain locally affordable in perpetuity. It will help sustain local communities and local economies and help raise the bar in design and construction standards. Now that it is launched, it will unlock a pipeline of thousands of new homes and help this innovative sector grow to make a substantial additional contribution to housing supply. A similar programme is being developed for London—delivered by the GLA—and an announcement on that will be made shortly.

We also want to protect the rights of tenants in the private rented sector and give them more security. That is why I am publishing today an eight-week consultation on overcoming the barriers to landlords offering longer tenancies to tenants in the private rented sector.

Longer tenancies will help tenants, particularly those with children, who are currently on short-term contracts and who are unable to plan for the future. Longer tenancies can benefit landlords too by helping to avoid the costs of finding new tenants. The aim is to collect views on what could be done to provide tenants with greater security while providing flexibility for landlords to regain their properties if their circumstances change. In the consultation, we propose a new model tenancy agreement of three years with a six-month break clause and options on how to implement the model which include legislation, financial incentives for landlords, and voluntary measures to encourage its use. Copies of the consultation will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available online.

Finally, for too long, the leasehold market has been left to evolve without much attention to who actually benefits. We are determined to reform the leasehold market to make it work for consumers. We have announced a programme of leasehold reform including a ban on new leasehold houses, restricting ground rents to a peppercorn and making enfranchisement easier, quicker and cheaper. We will bring forward legislation at the earliest opportunity, but we want the industry to change in advance of legislation and have written to developers setting out our expectations.

Today I can also confirm that Government funding schemes for housing supply will no longer support the unjustified use of leasehold for new houses, wherever possible, and that we will hardwire this as a condition into any new schemes. In future, ground rents on new long leases in flats will be limited to a peppercorn.

Attachments can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-07-02/HCWS818/.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Society Lotteries Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Tracey Crouch): I wish to inform the House that on Friday, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published a consultation on proposals for changes to the sales and prize limits for society lotteries to help charities raise more money.

The consultation follows the DCMS Select Committee recommendation in March 2015 that the Department look at whether limits on sales and prizes should be raised. Society lotteries are now a fundamental part of the giving landscape, and alongside the National Lottery, play an important role in supporting good causes across Great Britain. We have taken expert advice from the Gambling Commission and we believe that the proposed package of reforms maintains the balance between allowing charities and others to increase their fundraising through lotteries while protecting the unique position of the National Lottery.

We have considered options and the case for change carefully. A vital concern in developing proposals has been to ensure there is no risk to National Lottery’s ability to raise funds for good causes. The Gambling Commission has advised that to date there is no evidence
that society lotteries have had a detrimental effect on the National Lottery. The two currently offer distinct propositions to players, with the National Lottery raising large sums across the UK, characterised by life-changing prizes. Society lotteries offer smaller prizes, generally with their proceeds being returned to a specified good cause.

We are consulting on a range of options which seek to maintain the distinct nature of the two sectors but allow a degree of growth for society lotteries, the impact of which will be measured by the Gambling Commission.

Society lotteries have to return at least 20% of their sales to good causes. Currently they have a cap of £4 million of sales per draw and a maximum prize a society lottery can offer of £400,000. We are consulting on the following options:

**Individual per draw sales limits**
- Retaining the current limit of £4 million;
- Raising the limit to £5 million (Government's preferred option);
- Raising the limit to £10 million;
- Reducing the limit to £2.5 million

**Individual per draw prize limits**
- Retaining the current limit of £400,000;
- Raising the limit to £500,000 (Government’s preferred option);
- Raising the limit to £1 million;
- Reducing the limit to £250,000

In addition we are consulting on annual sales.

**Annual sales limits**
- Retaining the current limit of £10 million;
- Raising the limit to £50 million;
- Raising the limit to £100 million (Government’s preferred option)

The preferred set of proposals in the consultation document would raise the per draw limit to £5 million and the annual limit to £100 million. This would increase the amount of fundraising that can be done through society lotteries in a year ten-fold. It would also increase the maximum prize to £500,000.

The consultation also considers increasing the limits for small society lotteries, which do not require a Gambling Commission licence to operate and are instead registered with local authorities. Currently per draw proceeds are capped at £20,000 and annual proceeds are capped at £250,000. I am looking at options to increase the per draw limit to £30,000 or £40,000 and the annual limit to £400,000 or £500,000.

The consultation will run for 10 weeks and close on 7 September. Relevant documents have been published at: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-society-lottery-reform

[HCWS817]
The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council took place in Luxembourg on 18 June. I represented the UK.

The main focus of the Council was fisheries items. The most substantive of these was a presentation by the European Commission on the implementation of the common fisheries policy (CFP). Commissioner Vella outlined the main aims for 2019: reaching maximum sustainable yield targets, fully meeting the landing obligation, and implementing the Baltic and North Sea multi-annual plans (MAPs). There was an exchange of views among member states. The UK reiterated its commitment to the landing obligation and spoke of the need for pragmatic solutions to prevent choke problems in 2019.

The Netherlands gave a presentation to highlight a recent report from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) about pulse beam trawling. Member states agreed that more research was needed. The UK drew attention to original research being carried out by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), whose report is due in 2019.

There was a presentation by the Commission on a new proposal revising the control regulation. The presentation raised the possibility of increased electronic reporting and satellite control as well as greater oversight of the recreational fishing sector. Member states voiced concerns about the practicalities and costs of these changes, especially the introduction of CCTV.

The Commission also gave a presentation on a regulation on the European maritime and fisheries fund (EMFF), covering the period 2021-27, outlining its intention to give member states more flexibility in managing the fund. Member states welcomed the offer of greater flexibility but requested further discussion about the fund’s budget and administration.

The most substantive item for agriculture was a presentation by the Commission on reforms of the common agricultural policy after 2020. Member states expressed a range of views, with some of them concerned about planned budgetary cuts. Member states agreed on the importance of achieving real simplification. The Commission signalled further discussion on this topic and welcomed further constructive recommendations from member states.

The Commission also gave an update on the agricultural market situation, giving a generally positive assessment of the health of EU markets.

Six further items were discussed under “any other business”:

- the Slovenian delegation gave a presentation on their UN initiative “World Bee Day”;
- the Polish delegation presented on the situation in the pig meat market;
- the French delegation presented on the disposal of skimmed milk powder stocks;
- the Cyprus delegation gave information about the decreasing availability of water for agriculture in Cyprus;
- the Spanish delegation provided information about anti-subsidy and anti-dumping duties against Spanish table olives by the US authorities;
- the Hungarian delegation delivered a joint declaration of the Visegrad, Baltic, and Balkan member states about a shared initiative in agriculture, forestry, and aquaculture research, “BIOEAST”.

Until the UK leaves the European Union, the UK remains a full member of the EU and all the rights and obligations of EU membership remain in force. The outcome of our negotiations with the EU on the future partnership will determine what arrangements apply in relation to EU legislation in future.

[HCWS820]

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) was held in Luxembourg on 22 June 2018.

ECOFIN was preceded by a morning meeting of the EIB board of governors.

Annual EIB board of governors meeting

The EIB board of governors meeting included a speech by EIB President Werner Hoyer, a governors discussion on the future direction of the bank, reappointment of the board of directors, and approval of the audit report.

At ECOFIN, EU Finance Ministers discussed the following:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President briefed the Council on the outcomes of the 21 June meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission provided an update on the current economic situation in the EU. Following this, the Council discussed the next multiannual financial framework, and France and Germany reported on the outcomes of the Franco-German summit on 19 June.

VAT “quick-fixes”

The Council discussed the presidency compromise text in regards to the directive on harmonising and simplifying certain rules in the VAT system and introducing the definitive system for the taxation of trade between member states; the regulation regarding certain exemptions for intra-community transactions and the regulation regarding certified taxable persons. The Council was unable to reach agreement on a general approach.

European deposit insurance scheme

The Council took note of the presidency progress report on the European deposit insurance scheme.

Current financial services legislative proposals

The presidency provided an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Insolvency directive

The presidency provided an update on the insolvency, restructuring and second-chance directive.
National reform programmes 2018

The Council approved the 2018 country-specific recommendations as part of the European semester process.

Implementation of the stability and growth pact

The Council adopted Council decisions and recommendations in the context of both the excessive deficit procedure and the significant deviation procedure, also part of the European semester.

Convergence reports

Also as part of the European semester, the Commission and the European Central Bank presented the annual convergence reports.

Senior Managers and Certification Regime

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): The senior managers and certification regime (SM&CR) will come into force for financial services firms regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority only (also known as solo-regulated firms) from 9 December 2019.

The SM&CR is aimed at changing behaviours and culture in the financial services sector. It ensures that senior individuals in firms are approved by the relevant regulator, have a statement of responsibilities outlining what they are accountable for, and can be held personally responsible for misconduct. It also ensures that a code of conduct is set out for all financial services staff, and that employees in roles where they could do significant harm to consumers or to the UK’s financial stability are approved annually by their firm.

The SM&CR was first introduced for banks and building societies through the Financial Services (Banking Reform) Act 2013 and has applied to banks, building societies, credit unions, investment firms and UK branches of foreign banks since March 2016. The Government also legislated in the Bank of England and Financial Services Act 2016 to extend the SM&CR to all financial services firms. The Government recently announced the SM&CR would apply to insurance firms from 10 December 2018. The application to solo-regulated firms is the final stage in the extension of the SM&CR.

HM Treasury will make commencement regulations to bring the regime into force for solo-regulated firms.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

EU Withdrawal Act: Publication of Statements

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker): The Withdrawal Act requires statements of the “good reasons” for creation of and penalties for any criminal offences under the key powers in the Act. On 25 April the Baroness-in-waiting, Baroness Goldie, committed that these statements would be made available to Parliament before any SI which creates a criminal offence is laid before Parliament. The mechanism for ensuring this has been agreed and, in line with that commitment, I am making this statement to inform Members that those statements will be deposited, before the SI is laid, in the Libraries of both Houses where they will form a document series deposited under the commitment in this statement.

WOMEN AND EQUALITIES

LGBT Equality Government Publication

The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt): In July last year, the Government launched a national lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) survey, which asked LGBT people about their experiences of living in the UK.

I am pleased to be publishing both the Gender Recognition Act consultation and the survey findings today. I am also publishing a LGBT action plan, which sets out the Government’s policy response to the survey results.

The national LGBT survey received over 108,000 responses, making it the largest national survey of LGBT people conducted in the world to date. Responses covered a range of issues, including safety, health, education and the experience of being LGBT in the UK. The findings will serve as a crucial additional to the evidence base. While there were many positives to take from the findings, they also show that there is more to do before we achieved equality for LGBT people in the UK.

The LGBT action plan contains more than 70 actions that the Government will take in order to address the survey findings. These include the appointment of a national LGBT health adviser within the NHS to tackle the health inequalities that LGBT people face, the extension of the existing anti-homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying programme and a commitment to end the practice of conversion therapy in the UK. This plan will be supported by the provision of £4.5 million from within existing Government Equalities Office budgets in 2018-19 and 2019-20. I want this plan to be delivered by the end of this Parliament and funding beyond 2019-20 will be agreed through the spending review process.

Finally, I am publishing a report that sets out the progress that the Government have made on delivering commitments made in two prior LGBT action plans that were published in 2011. The publication of this update meets a commitment that was made to the Women and Equalities Select Committee in 2016, following its landmark transgender equality inquiry.

Taken together, the documents that I am publishing today represent a significant milestone in this Government’s commitment to building a country that works for everyone, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

I will also be publishing, later today, the consultation on the Gender Recognition Act and supporting documents.

I have arranged for copies of the documents to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.
The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi): Today I am publishing two pieces of statutory safeguarding guidance which set the framework within which all practitioners should operate in order to protect children from abuse and neglect and promote their best interests.

These are:
- revised “Working Together to Safeguard Children” statutory guidance;
- new “Local Safeguarding—Transitional Arrangements” statutory guidance.

“Working Together to Safeguard Children” (2018) has been revised to implement the safeguarding reforms introduced through the Children and Social Work Act 2017 and related regulations.

In broad terms these are:
- the replacement of local safeguarding children boards with new local safeguarding arrangements, led by three safeguarding partners (local authorities, chief officers of police, and clinical commissioning groups);
- a new system of local and national child safeguarding practice reviews, which will replace serious case reviews; and
- new arrangements for child death reviews, to be led by clinical commissioning groups and local authorities.

The opportunity has also been taken to make other minor changes to clarify processes or to reflect recent changes to policy, for example through the insertion of guidance on contextual safeguarding which includes protecting children from threats such as criminal and sexual exploitation.

In parallel, we are also publishing updated practice guidance, “Information sharing advice for safeguarding practitioners”, which reflects these safeguarding reforms and changes made through the Data Protection Act 2018.

This is an important piece of guidance which sets out the drive on the left rules for agencies, organisations and practitioners to know what they must do individually and collectively to safeguard children. It sets out how they should work together in fulfilling this responsibility, including taking a child-centred and co-ordinated approach to safeguarding. At the same time, these documents support practitioners to exercise their expertise and judgment on how best to protect children and young people, and promote their welfare.

Protection from abuse and neglect is a fundamental right for all children. Nothing is more important than keeping children safe. These documents will help all those working with children to do just that.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Steve Baker): With the Royal Assent of the EU (Withdrawal) Act 2018, the Government have started laying affirmative statutory instruments to prepare the statute book for exit. The Government will not lay negative statutory instruments requiring sifting until the necessary procedures for establishing the new Committee in the Commons and the expansion of the remit of the House of Lords’ Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee are concluded. However, the Government are starting to publish final drafts of the negative statutory instruments that require sifting (“proposed negatives”) on www.gov.uk as they are ready. This is to increase transparency and to allow Parliament and the public to have early sight of the forthcoming legislation.

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): The United Kingdom is strongly committed to working closely with the British overseas territories in the Caribbean, to support their efforts to be as well prepared for the hurricane season as possible. In that context, the UK and the overseas territories share a collective responsibility for hurricane preparedness and are therefore working together to prepare for this year’s hurricane season. The hurricane season runs from June to November, with the period of highest risk from August to October. Following the devastating impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria last September, there remain some serious challenges in preparing for
this year’s season, especially in those territories still recovering from the last year’s category 5 hurricanes. The UK remains fully committed to supporting their ongoing recovery, while also helping with preparations and resilience.

We have learned important lessons from our response last year, and are working to ensure an even stronger response to any hurricane this year. This includes strengthened co-ordination and communication with the overseas territories themselves, with regional countries and institutions, and involving other partners with territories in the region. We have prepared clearer guidance on command and control structures, and mechanisms for earlier escalation once there is a reasonable possibility that a hurricane is heading to the region. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) (alongside key partners) will monitor the impacts that any severe weather event during the hurricane season could have on the overseas territories. The FCO in consultation with Number 10 and the civil contingencies secretariat in the Cabinet Office, will work together to understand the nature and complexity of the situation and the severity of the impacts that are likely to be seen. As required, the Government will stand up crisis response systems, to co-ordinate and drive the response to the affected overseas territories.

The FCO, DFID and MOD are working closely to prepare for the hurricane season, drawing in other Departments and agencies as necessary. This year, the Met Office has also developed improved advisory arrangements for the Caribbean, and we are working more closely with them to gain a better understanding of the technical data as tropical storms are identified and develop.

Through the conflict, security and stability fund (CSSF), the FCO has boosted its disaster preparedness capability in the region through the contracting of experts from the stabilisation unit, who are leading on negotiations in advance of peak hurricane season on a number of commercial contracts to deliver essential recovery needs. This will complement the emergency provisions based on RFA Mounts Bay, and free up military assets to concentrate on key tasks such as helping to get ports and airports reopened for the delivery of supplies. We are also drawing up agreements to ensure that other services can be deployed rapidly if needed. This work is complementary to longer term strategic planning work over the next three years under the FCO-run overseas territories disaster management programme and the Anguilla and British Virgin Islands (BVI) recovery programmes, funded by the CSSF. This also follows on from CSSF funded work over the past six months to boost early recovery efforts including but not limited to re-electrification for Anguilla and BVI; infrastructure support to Anguilla’s airport; and security agency support, which includes infrastructure, capacity building and social housing. A project under way to hurricane-strengthen the hospital on Anguilla is a good example of increasing resilience and “building back better”.

We are also planning to pre-position more resource in theatre during the hurricane season and to have a greater range of specialist capabilities on stand-by. The MOD has carried out reconnaissance and analysis in the overseas territories, building links and familiarity with local and regional disaster management personnel, conducting professional analysis of selected critical infrastructure, and gaining a detailed understanding of the overall state of the overseas territories. A multi-national co-ordination cell located in the Caribbean (MNCCC) will be set up to provide integrated logistical co-ordination between partner countries and organisations, including the UK, USA, Canada, the Netherlands and France, working alongside the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA). This will enable a single integrated process for assessing, communicating, deciding on and responding to needs in the independent Caribbean and the overseas territories.

MOD’S preparations and planning for hurricane relief in the Caribbean in 2018 have been extensive. The Defence contribution will be more specialised than in 2017 and will exploit MOD’S unique capabilities to best effect. The response will be scalable dependant on need and rely upon specialist forces positioned in the region—including RFA Mounts Bay, already on station. This will enable immediate assistance and damage assessments, informing the carefully tailored response force to follow. The priorities of any response are threefold: to clear a path for others, to support communications, and to ensure security should it prove necessary. Essential aid and supplies cannot enter the affected islands, or be de-distributed, unless ports and airports are reopened and public order and a sense of security are upheld.

The Caribbean catastrophe risk insurance fund (CCRIF) paid out over $50 million to Caribbean countries and territories affected by the 2017 hurricanes. However, not all islands were insured. This year, the UK has supported BVI and Montserrat to join as new members. Now, all of the islands which were affected last year are covered by CCRIF, which DFID originally helped develop.

DFID is preparing hands-on help as an early response mechanism, in the form of fast mobilisation of humanitarian and logistics experts and essential supplies if required. DFID has embarked emergency supplies in RFA Mounts Bay, and can air-lift other essential humanitarian items and work with professional humanitarian partners on the ground if required. DFID is supporting CDEMA to improve its procurement and logistics capacity and stands ready to fund its first responders to disaster affected countries. DFID has well established programmes in the poorer Commonwealth countries of the Caribbean and, in addition to humanitarian assistance, is supporting reconstruction efforts in the hurricane-affected islands of Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda. DFID has also fielded a preparedness mission to the region from 5 to 17 June to co-ordinate UK preparations with both national and regional institutions.

We have engaged with the Governments of the overseas territories to ensure that their plans are as robust as possible, and to bolster their command and control capabilities as well as their capacity to deal with early humanitarian requirements. We are also planning to deploy certain skills and additional support to the islands in advance of a storm’s arrival or immediately thereafter. Staff with relevant skills who can be deployed at short notice have been identified.

The UK hosted an event on 28 June with a number of partner countries (France, the Netherlands, Canada, and the USA). Several countries in the region, including the Cayman Islands, Jamaica, Barbados and Mexico, attended together with CDEMA. This meeting covered
three key areas: military assistance, emergency humanitarian assistance, and political/communications, as well as how we best support affected individuals. The UK is hoping to have the outcomes endorsed at a meeting at ministerial level before the end of July. Greater co-operation in these areas will lead to a stronger and more effective regional response in the event of a hurricane hitting our overseas territories in the Caribbean.

[HCWS827]

JUSTICE

Courts Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): Today, I am laying before Parliament legislation reducing court fees for certain proceedings in the civil courts and the Court of Protection in England and Wales. As a result, claimants bringing these proceedings will pay less to access the courts.

The reduction to these fees follows a thorough and detailed review undertaken by officials in the Ministry of Justice into the cost of these proceedings. Our review has identified a number of cases where the fees charged were above full cost recovery levels. We are therefore taking action to reduce those fees. We will also be establishing a refund scheme to reimburse people the amounts they have been overcharged. We are also taking action to refund those who have been overcharged fees to commence certain low-value personal injury claims, known as “stage 3” claims. Officials are working on the detailed arrangements and full details of the scheme, including the types of case affected, and how to apply, will be announced in due course.

These changes affect the fees charged for certain proceedings in the Court of Protection; a number of civil proceedings in the magistrates courts; fees for general applications in insolvency proceedings; and the fees charged for High Court judges sitting as arbitrators. The intention when these fees were prescribed was that they should be set at, or below, full cost recovery levels and it was on that basis that they were approved by Parliament.

As part of our ongoing improvements we are making to the justice system, including the Government’s £1 billion investment in court reform, we will continue our review of court fees, including the methodology for setting those fees, to minimise the risk of this issue reoccurring in future. The vision of the reform is to modernise and upgrade the court and tribunal system so that it works even better for everyone, from the victims of crime, witnesses and litigants to judges and legal professionals.

[HCWS830]

TRANSPORT

HS2 Phase 2b Eastern Leg Rolling Stock Depot Location

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling): I would like to update the house on plans for the HS2 phase 2b eastern leg rolling stock depot. I am today confirming the depot should be located at a site in the Aire valley, adjacent to the M1, to the east of Leeds. This decision is laid out in today’s publication of the HS2 phase 2b eastern leg rolling stock depot consultation response.

It was originally proposed that the depot be sited near Crofton, east of Wakefield. Due to operational and community concerns after the M18/ eastern route decision was announced, I asked HS2 Ltd to review alternative options for the depot site. The east of Leeds site was identified and a consultation seeking views on this proposed location was launched on 17 July 2017 and ran until 12 October 2017. The consultation revealed broad support for the new location.

This decision has been made with local development plans on the wider site in mind. HS2 Ltd will continue to work with stakeholders to support local regeneration proposals on the wider site.

[HCWS825]
The construction sector deal will deliver:

- homes by 2022.
- of the Government’s ambition to build 1.5 million new homes and where needed. The deal will boost the delivery of homes, schools and other buildings which can be quickly expanded global construction market. The deal will support the development of affordable, easy to construct homes, schools and other buildings which can be quickly and sustainably manufactured on site and then assembled when and where needed. The deal will boost the delivery of the Government’s ambition to build 1.5 million new homes by 2022.

The construction sector deal will deliver:

- £420 million of investment to transform construction through developing and commercialising new digital and offsite manufacturing technologies for construction, which will aim to reduce the cost of new buildings by a third, and half the time taken to deliver them;
- Cheaper energy bills for families and businesses—supporting the industrial strategy clean growth mission to halve the energy use of new builds by 2030;
- 25,000 construction apprenticeship starts and 1,000 construction T-level placements; and
- Supporting the UK construction sector to compete in the global market for infrastructure which is worth US $2.5 trillion a year.

With almost half of the economy reliant on the built environment and the services it enables, this deal brings together the construction, manufacturing, energy and digital sectors to deliver innovative approaches that improve productivity in the construction sector and accelerate a shift to building more efficient, safer, healthier and more affordable places to live, work and learn.

Sector deals, where industries are invited to come forward with plans for their future, embody the ethos of our collaborative approach. They show how industry and the Government, working in partnership, can boost the productivity and earning power of specific sectors. We have already struck ambitious deals with the artificial intelligence, life sciences, automotive and creative industries sectors with the nuclear sector deal announced last week, and we look forward to building on this in the months ahead.

I am placing a copy of the “Construction Sector Deal” in the Libraries of both Houses.

[HCWS831]

**EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**General Affairs Council: 26 June 2018**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union (Mr Robin Walker): Lord Callanan, Minister of State for Exiting the European Union, has made the following statement:

I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) meeting in Luxembourg on 26 June. A provisional report of the meeting and the conclusions adopted can be found on the Council of the European Union’s website at:


**Enlargement and stabilisation and association process**

Ministers agreed Council conclusions on enlargement policy and the stabilisation and association process. Subject to progress on rule of law reform, the Council set out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019 with Albania and Macedonia, which I supported.

**Preparation of the European Council on 28 and 29 June 2018**

Ministers prepared June European Council by discussing the draft conclusions issued on 25 June. On migration, Ministers exchanged views on internal and external migration, the reform of the common European asylum system and measures to strengthen the EU’s external borders.

On security and defence, Ministers discussed EU-NATO co-operation, permanent structured co-operation (PESCO) and the European defence industrial development programme. I supported the draft conclusions on chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear threats which were issued as part of the response to the attack on Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury on 4 March. I also welcomed the inclusion of language in the draft conclusions on measures to counter malign cyber-activity.

In discussions on jobs, growth and competitiveness, I highlighted the UK’s concerns surrounding proposals on investment screening. On the response to the US decision to impose tariffs on the EU for aluminium and steel imports, I supported the measures that had been taken and welcomed calls to avoid the further escalation of this situation.

Ministers also debated digital and innovation matters, external relations and the multiannual financial framework.

**European semester**

In accordance with the European semester process, Ministers approved country-specific recommendations (CSR) on the economic and social outcomes which member states will work towards over the course of the following year. The Council is expected to formally adopt the CSRs in July.

**Interinstitutional agreement implementation**

Ministers reviewed the implementation of the interinstitutional agreement on better law-making (IIA BLM) and considered the work that has been carried out during the first half of 2018.

**Rule of law in Poland**

The Council held a hearing under article 7 (1) TEU reasoned proposal

The Council held a hearing under article 7 (1) treaty on European Union. The Commission set out its concerns on the judicial reforms enacted by the Polish authorities. In response, Poland provided a detailed presentation which set out the context and content of the reforms and highlighted the political sensitivities. Thirteen member states asked Poland questions and Poland responded. The presidency confirmed that Ministers would return to this matter at future meetings of the GAC.

[HCWS833]
The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Defence, the right hon. Earl Howe, and I attended the Joint Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). I also attended a meeting of the FAC for Foreign Ministers only. The Council was chaired by the High Representative and Vice-President of the European Union (EU) for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini. The meeting was held in Luxembourg.

Security and defence co-operation

Foreign and Defence Ministers discussed EU security and defence co-operation, permanent structured co-operation (PESCO), military mobility, the European defence fund, the European peace facility, the fight against hybrid threats, and the importance of strengthening the EU’s resilience to such threats and civilian capability development.

The Council adopted conclusions on security and defence. It also adopted a decision setting out governance rules for projects undertaken under PESCO, and approved the overarching high-level part of the military requirements for military mobility within and beyond the EU.

EU-NATO co-operation

Ahead of the NATO summit on 11 and 12 July, Foreign and Defence Ministers exchanged views on EU-NATO co-operation with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg. Against the background of challenges in the transatlantic relationship, Ministers underlined the continuing good collaboration on security and defence between the EU and NATO. Ministers also highlighted the important progress made on the 74 concrete actions implementing the July 2016 joint declaration between the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the NATO Secretary-General. Ministers encouraged further co-operation, in particular on military mobility and on countering hybrid threats.

Yemen

Ministers discussed Yemen with the United Nations (UN) Special Envoy Martin Griffiths, who briefed them on his peace plan. Ministers exchanged views on ongoing EU efforts and explored ways to strengthen the UN-led process. The Council adopted conclusions on Yemen.

Horn of Africa and the Red sea

The Council discussed and adopted conclusions on the horn of Africa and the Red sea. Ministers highlighted the strategic importance of the region for the EU. They expressed their support to efforts aimed at the creation of an organised and inclusive regional forum for dialogue and co-operation around the Red sea.

EU global strategy

The Council reviewed the implementation of the EU global strategy based on the second implementation report. Ministers welcomed the important progress made.

Jordan

The HRVP reported back on her recent visit to Jordan. Ministers expressed their strong support for Jordan as one of the countries most affected by the crisis in Syria. Ministers took stock of EU-Jordanian relations including socioeconomic co-operation under the EU-Jordan partnership. They expressed the importance of maintaining a high level of support to Jordan which faces a critical time both politically and economically and highlighted the importance of supporting the new Government to continue economic and social reforms.

The Council also agreed a number of measures without discussion:

- The Council adopted the EU priorities at the UN and 73rd UN General Assembly;
- The Council adopted conclusions on Sahel/Mali;
- The Council adopted the decision on the signing and provisional application of a protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean agreement establishing an association between the EU and Israel to take account of the accession of the Republic of Croatia to the EU;
- The Council placed seven individuals under restrictive measures in light of the situation in Myanmar/Burma;
- The Council extended the mandates of six EU special representatives for Bosnia and Herzegovina, central Asia, horn of Africa, Kosovo, Sahel and the south Caucasus, and the crisis in Georgia;
- The Council decided to put 11 individuals holding official positions under restrictive measures who are responsible for human rights violations and for undermining democracy and the rule of law in Venezuela;
- The Council approved the progress catalogue 2018;
- The Council adopted conclusions on EU co-operation with cities and local authorities in third countries.

[HCWS832]
The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mel Stride):

Today is the first legislation day in the new single fiscal event timetable, with the release of draft finance Bill legislation moved forward to July. This move makes more time available to scrutinise draft tax legislation ahead of its introduction and commencement, and should provide businesses and individual taxpayers with greater certainty and stability. It forms part of the Government's commitment to publishing the majority of tax legislation in draft before it is introduced to Parliament. The Government have consulted on a number of tax policies announced in the Autumn Budget 2017 and other events and are today publishing responses to these consultations alongside draft legislation to be included in Finance Bill 2018-19, which will be introduced to Parliament following the next Budget.

Policy decisions in response to consultation

In response to consultation, the Government have made a number of policy decisions, including relating to:

Rent-a-room relief

Following the call for evidence the Government will retain rent-a-room relief at its current level of £7,500 and will introduce a new shared occupancy test, which must be met in order for income to qualify. The test will require the taxpayer to be living in the residence, and physically present for at least some part of the letting period, ensuring the relief meets its original purpose. The Government have published draft legislation to this effect.

Amendments to Gaming Duty accounting periods

The Government have published draft legislation to maintain the current arrangements of six-month accounting periods for gaming duty, but to remove the requirement to make payments on account. Additionally, the Government are introducing provision to allow for losses to be carried forward and offset against duty liabilities in future accounting periods. This will make the tax fairer and simpler.

Late payment of tax penalties and interest

Following consultation, the Government have published draft legislation for a new late payment penalty system and proposals to align interest rules across taxes. This is in addition to previously announced reforms to late filing penalties. The new penalty system will support tax compliance in a fair, proportionate manner. The rates that will apply to late payment penalties will be decided as part of a package to be announced at a future fiscal event.

Draft legislation being published for technical tax changes

In addition, the Government are publishing a small number of technical tax changes that need to be made to ensure legislation works as intended. These include measures relating to:

- Clarifying the effect of the Optional Remuneration Arrangements legislation in respect of taxable cars and vans
- Modernising the exemption relating to premiums and contributions paid by employers for death in service and retirement benefits.
- The Government have also published draft legislation to comply with EU tax directives that they are required to transpose before the end of the implementation period.

Legislation with immediate effect

The Government have published draft legislation for the following measures that will have immediate or retrospective effect:

Changes to the income tax treatment of emergency vehicles

The Government have published draft legislation with wholly relieving effect to extend the scope of the current income tax exemption for emergency vehicles to cover all commuting journeys and to make related provisions. This will be treated as having taken effect on 6 April 2017.

Workplace charging for all-electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles

As announced at Autumn Budget 2017, the draft legislation published today introducing an exemption to remove any tax liability for charging electric cars or plug-in hybrids at or near a workplace will be treated as having taken effect on 6 April 2018.

Amendments to Corporate Interest Restriction rules

The Government have published draft legislation to clarify the application of the Corporate Interest Restriction (CIR) legislation in a number of specific circumstances and ensure that the rules work as intended. Certain wholly relieving elements of the changes being made, such as to the amendment of the CIR rules to Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) to prevent REITs suffering a double restriction in certain cases, will be deemed to always have had effect. This change will ensure the CIR rules apply as originally intended.

Corporation tax relief for carried-forward losses

The Government have published draft legislation for exchequer protection purposes to put beyond doubt the amount of relief that may be claimed, and also ensure the regime applies to insurers within the basic life assurance and general annuity business as intended. The legislation will take effect from 6 July 2018 to prevent companies from claiming excessive relief.

Future responses

For other consultations, including those relating to withholding tax on royalties, hidden economy conditionality, the intangible fixed assets regime and tax abuse and insolvency, the Government are continuing to consider the responses and will respond in due course.

Draft legislation is accompanied by a Tax Information and Impact Note (TUN), an Explanatory Note (EN) and, where applicable, a summary of responses to consultation document. All publications can be found on the.gov.uk website. The Government’s tax consultation tracker has also been updated. The technical consultation on draft legislation will be open for eight weeks, closing on 31 August 2018.

[HCWS834]
Written Statements

Monday 9 July 2018

TREASURY

JHA Opt-in Decision: Assignment of Claims

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen):

The Government have decided not to opt in (under the UK’s JHA opt-in protocol) to the proposal for a regulation on the law applicable to the third-party effects of assignments of claims.

In the proposed regulation, the competence for the EU to act stems from Article 81 (2) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. As such, the entire regulation represents justice and home affairs obligations, thereby triggering the UK’s opt-in.

The proposal applies a general rule that the law of the country where the assignor has their habitual residence governs the third-party effects of the assignment of claims (“law of the habitual claim”), but carves out three exceptions to the above rule, applying the law of the assigned claim to (i) the assignment of cash credited to a bank account; (ii) the assignment of claims arising from certain types of derivatives; and (iii) in certain circumstances to securitised entities. This is different to current market practice in significant parts of UK financial services, where the law governing a claim is determined by contractual agreement (“law of the assigned claim”).

The Government have concluded that it is in the UK’s interest not to opt in to this regulation. Its provisions would have significant unintended consequences for financial services market practices in the UK. It would create uncertainty for financial services transactions, could require changes to business as usual functions, and introduces an applicable law test that may contradict existing applicable law provisions such as those relating to securities.

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Until the UK leaves the EU it remains a full and participating member. We will continue to work with the EU institutions, with the aim of ensuring that UK objectives are preserved as the negotiations progress, thereby triggering the UK’s opt-in.

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met in special session to address the pressing issue of upholding the global ban on the use of chemical weapons. In a previous statement on 30 November 2017, I updated the House on the use of chemical weapons in Syria and the organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)—UN Joint Investigative Mechanism [HCWS291]. The Prime Minister has briefed the House on various occasions following the use of a nerve agent in Salisbury in March this year [12 March 2018, Volume 637 and 14 March 2018, Volume 637] and the chemical weapons attack in Douma in April [Debate on 16 April 2018, Volume 639].

This special session of the Conference of States Parties was the first such meeting convened at a State Party’ s request since 2002. The UK alongside a number of international partners called this meeting to provide an opportunity for the international community to address the use of chemical weapons in Malaysia, Syria, Iraq (by Daesh) and the UK.

The UK proposed a draft decision, co-sponsored by 30 States Parties entitled “Addressing the threat from chemical weapons use”. The aim was to bring together the 193 members who have signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention to reaffirm their support for the Convention and for the OPCW, and to secure effective action to protect the global norm against CW use. We consulted widely with international partners on the draft of the decision, building broad support across all geographic regions.

Opposition from a few States meant, as we had anticipated, that consensus was not possible. But proposed amendments from Kazakhstan, Belarus, Bolivia, Iran and Burundi were defeated by substantial margins, leading to Russia, China and Burundi withdrawing alternative texts that sought to paralyse the work of the OPCW.

Most importantly, the decision we secured empowers the OPCW to attribute responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria, both past and if needed, in the future. The crucial gap left by the ending of the mandate of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigation Mechanism last November, due to a series of Russian vetoes in the UN Security Council, has been filled. The decision also mandates the director general of the OPCW to make proposals at the next meeting of the Conference of States Parties in November to establish independent, impartial expert arrangements to identify those responsible for the use of chemical weapons, if requested by any State Party which is investigating possible chemical weapons use on its territory.

The decision covers a range of related issues. It officially recognises the findings of the OPCW-UN Joint Investigative Mechanism in 2016 and 2017, confirming four chemical weapons attacks by the Syrian regime between 2014 and 2017 including significantly the sarin attack on Khan Sheikhoun in April 2017, and the use of chemical weapons by Daesh on two occasions in 2015 and 2016. It authorises the sharing of information gathered by the OPCW with the Independent Impartial and Independent Mechanism set up by the UN General Assembly under resolution 71/248 (2016) and other relevant investigatory entities established under UN auspices. And it provides for additional action by the OPCW to provide further assistance to the States to help prevent the threat posed by non-state actors.

The UK-drafted decision, adopted by 82 votes to 24 at a meeting attended by 152 (the largest number of States ever to have attended a Conference of States Parties) sends a clear message that the international community has not been deceived by the diplomatic manoeuvring of recent months and concluded that action must be taken to protect the Convention, and prevent impunity for chemical weapons use.

The Convention is a key element of the international disarmament and arms control system. This welcome outcome was the product of determined diplomacy over many years, and a particular effort in the weeks prior to the Conference. The achievement is all the more notable in light of the deadlock in the UN Security Council where all attempts to continue, or revive international investigations into responsibility for chemical weapons use in Syria were vetoed over the last year.

The UK is proud to have led the diplomatic efforts to secure this outcome. We look forward to working with all members of the Chemical Weapons Convention to implement the decision. The UK will continue to work with States around the world to support progress towards universal and effective national implementation of the Convention and uphold the ban on chemical weapons development, production, stockpiling and use. The UK will contribute an additional £1 million to the work of the OPCW in order to assist the implementation of the decision and the OPCW’s work with States to uphold non-proliferation and disarmament.

[HCWS835]

**TRANSPORT**

**Roads Update**

The Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Grayling):

Today I am publishing the Government’s zero emission road transport strategy “Road to Zero”. The transition to zero emission road transport is happening now across the world. It will mean fundamental changes to the global automotive market, worth over £1.5 trillion a year, bringing new jobs and growth opportunities for the UK. These include those we are already enjoying through Nissan in Sunderland, producing one in eight zero emission cars bought in Europe in 2017, and the London Electric Vehicle Company near Coventry, which put the world’s first electric black taxis on the streets of London earlier this year.

This Government’s vision is to build a Britain that is fit for the future. Leading the industries of the future and building the UK’s competitiveness in the face of major global economic trends are key parts of our industrial strategy. That is why our 2040 mission to put the UK at the forefront of the design and manufacturing of zero emission vehicles is central to the future of mobility and clean growth industrial strategy grand challenges.

The benefits are not just economic. Road transport is one of the biggest contributors to poor air quality in some of the UK’s towns and cities. And transport is the largest greenhouse gas-emitting sector in the UK. The work we are doing today to make road transport cleaner will mean we are handing the next generation a better,
cleaner, greener Britain. It will improve the health and lives of people across the UK. It will help us achieve our statutory long-term greenhouse gas targets and our air quality commitments.

We have already made significant progress thanks to this Government’s £1.5 billion investment. Today there are more than 150,000 ultra low emission vehicles in the UK and around 14,000 public chargepoints, with hundreds more being added every month. There is a network of over 1,300 rapid chargepoints—one of the largest in Europe.

But we need action on a number of fronts to give certainty to the market and the consumer that the Government are fully behind this transition. The “Road to Zero” strategy sets out both our long-term ambitions and the measures we are taking to get there. It builds on our industrial strategy, automotive sector deal, clean growth strategy and the UK plan for tackling roadside nitrogen dioxide concentrations.

**Government’s long-term ambitions**

As set out in the Government’s N02 plan, we will end the sale of new conventional petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2040. By then, we expect the majority of new cars and vans sold to be 100% zero emission and all new cars and vans to have significant zero emission capability. By 2050 we want almost every car and van to be zero emission. We expect this transition to be industry and consumer led, supported in the coming years by the measures set out in this strategy. We will review progress by 2025 and consider what interventions are required if not enough progress is being made.

In addition, by 2030, we want to see at least 50%, and as many as 70%, of new car sales being ultra low emission.

Government have a key role to play. The strategy contains a package of measures covering the three key issues: supply of vehicles to the market; consumer demand; and a fit for purpose infrastructure network.

**The right infrastructure to support the transition**

If we are to help people to make the right choice of vehicle for their journey, then one element will be to reduce range anxiety on electric vehicles. The strategy sets out a package of measures to ensure that electric vehicle drivers will be able to easily locate and access charging infrastructure that is affordable, efficient and reliable. We will continue to provide grants to encourage people to charge at home overnight, both on and off streets. This is how we envisage the majority of charging will take place.

Today we are announcing our intention that all new homes, where appropriate, should have a chargepoint available. We plan to consult as soon as possible on introducing a requirement for chargepoint infrastructure for new dwellings in England. We will look at how to achieve this in the most cost-effective way, mindful of the Government’s housing supply objectives. We also want all new street lighting columns to include charging points, where appropriately located, in residential areas with current on-street parking provision.

Workplace and public infrastructure will also be vital. The strategy contains a range of measures to support the development of these networks. These include an increase to the grant available for workplace charging, a joint pilot with Highways England to increase electrical capacity at a motorway service area, Highways England’s commitment to ensuring there is a chargepoint every 20 miles along the strategic road network by 2020 and the £400 million charging infrastructure investment fund announced at Budget 2017 to accelerate the roll out of chargepoints.

In this parliamentary Session we have taken the Automated and Electric Vehicles Bill through Parliament, now only awaiting Royal Assent, to improve the experience and provision of chargepoints. The Bill gives Government powers to ensure that chargepoints are available at motorway service areas and large fuel retailers, with Metro Mayors granted powers in relation to the latter. It also gives powers to ensure that chargepoints are easily accessed and used across the UK. This includes providing a uniform method of accessing public chargepoints and refuelling points; making certain information publicly available in an open and transparent format; and setting reliability standards.

We will also ensure the electricity system now and in the future is ready for this transition. We and the energy sector are confident that existing market mechanisms will be able to meet additional electricity demand. Provisions in the aforementioned Bill to mandate smart charging, and our £30 million R and D investment in technologies allowing electricity to pass from vehicles into the grid at times of peak demand, will help alleviate these effects. We have launched an electric vehicles energy taskforce to bring together the relevant parts of industry and Government to ensure the transition is smooth.

**The supply of vehicles and associated technologies to market**

In our automotive sector deal, we made major new commitments to research and development in zero emission vehicle technology, and to developing competitive UK supply chains. This included the £246 million Faraday battery challenge, which is already supporting the development of battery technology in the UK. We will continue to support our established multi-million pound research and development programme for ultra low emission vehicles, which has been estimated to have a rate of return of £8 for every £1 invested.

The industry has an ambition to increase the level of UK content by value in domestically built vehicles to 50% by 2022. We want to work with industry to set a target at least as ambitious for the ultra low emission vehicle supply chain as we look to secure investment in UK battery manufacturing.

**Consumer and business demand for ultra low emission vehicles**

A recent survey indicated that around 38% of consumers considering a new car purchase would consider an electric car. However, only 2% of new car sales are currently ultra low emission.

More models are coming to market, giving consumers greater choice. Battery prices are coming down and we are committed to keeping in place our plug-in car and van grants until at least 2020. The tax system also favours ultra low and particularly zero emission vehicles over conventional ones. The strategy recognises that consumer incentives in some form will continue to play a role in driving uptake beyond 2020. And with industry we are launching the 2018-19 Go Ultra Low consumer campaign to promote the benefits of these vehicles and improve understanding of the choices available.

The Government will lead consumer uptake with 100% of central Government car fleets being ultra low emission by 2030.
Reducing emissions from conventional vehicles

However, it’s important to recognise that today over 99% of global car and van sales are petrol or diesel. Our strategy sets out how we will reduce emissions from the vehicles on our roads now and during the transition to zero emission vehicles. We will do this by increasing the supply and sustainability of low carbon fuels, accelerating the adoption of fuel efficient motoring and ensuring that our future approach to vehicle emissions regulation as we leave the European Union is at least as ambitious as current arrangements.

Cleaner diesel vehicles can play an important part in reducing CO$_2$ emissions from road transport during the transition to zero emission vehicles whilst meeting ever more stringent air quality standards. For diesel vehicles to play their part fully, their air quality impact must continue to be reduced. We welcome the continued innovation and investment by vehicle manufacturers to develop cleaner diesel vehicles that meet the more challenging real driving emissions (RDE) requirements, delivering critical improvements in NOx emissions on our roads.

In addition to working in Europe to set ambitious new EU CO$_2$ emissions standards for HGVs, we also recognise the need to reduce emissions from existing HGVs significantly. Working in partnership with industry leaders, the Government are also announcing a new industry-wide voluntary commitment for reducing HGV greenhouse gas emissions by 15% by 2025.

The strategy also sets out the results of our assessment of the environmental performance of the road vehicle fuels and technologies available to consumers. It is clear that zero emission vehicle options deliver the greatest environmental benefits regardless of vehicle type or use.

In the transition to zero emission vehicles, clear and consistent consumer information will be essential. We will set up a road transport emissions advice group to bring together Government, industry and consumer groups to work together to meet this challenge.

Conclusions

We cannot deliver this strategy alone. We are committed to working in partnership with industry, businesses, academia, environmental groups and others. That includes the devolved Administrations of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, who are taking significant steps to accelerate the transition. This is a UK-wide strategy and our core package of vehicle and chargepoint grants applies across the UK. We are working with local areas. We are also playing a leading role internationally, bringing together the international community in September’s groundbreaking zero emission vehicle summit.

Other changes are happening to the automotive sector including automation and new business models, which are challenging our assumptions about how we travel. The future of mobility grand challenge has been established to harness the opportunities presented by these changes and consider their impact on our society. Later this year, we will be publishing our strategy for the future of urban mobility, and we will shortly be engaging on this.

By putting the UK at the forefront of the twenty-first century transport revolution, we can ensure our automotive sector—one of our greatest success stories—continues to thrive and create good jobs across the country. We can set a global standard for managing technological change to maximise economic and environmental benefits. We will work with industry to achieve this ambition, and share the benefits this opportunity presents. Helping us achieve our goals of cleaner air, a better environment, zero emission vehicles, a strong clean economy.

A copy of this document is being placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The attachment can be viewed online at: http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/ Commons/2018-07-09/HCWS839/.
Written Statements

Tuesday 10 July 2018

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media Matters

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): This written statement is to update the House on the process and timings regarding the proposed merger between 21st Century Fox (21CF) and Sky Plc (Sky).

On 5 June, the previous Secretary of State made a statement to the House in which he set out his decision in relation to the proposed merger. He announced that having considered the Competition and Markets Authority’s (CMA) report, he agreed with its findings on the public interest grounds and its finding that undertakings to divest Sky News to the Walt Disney Company (Disney) or to an alternative suitable buyer could potentially remedy the public interest concerns identified. Following the completion of discussions with the parties, on 19 June he published a consultation on the undertakings offered by 21CF along with new undertakings offered by Disney for the divestment of Sky News to Disney and the relevant subsidiary agreements. We received five responses to the consultation, which closed on 4 July.

Having taken over as the Secretary of State with responsibility for media public interest cases, I intend to keep to the timetable of informing the House this week of the final decisions and publishing all the relevant documents. I will do this by Thursday 12 July.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Post-June Environment Council

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey): My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lord Gardiner of Kimble) attended EU Environment Council on 25 June in Luxembourg.

I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

Directive on drinking water (recast)—policy debate

The Council held a policy debate on the drinking water directive (8924/18), focusing on materials in contact with water (Article 10) and access to water (Article 13). Most member states, including the UK, did not agree with the Commission’s proposed approach to Article 10—citing the need for EU level harmonised hygiene requirements and for the inclusion of all products from source to tap as a way to protect public health. Several member states and the Commission drew attention to the technical non-paper from the “4MS initiative” (France, UK, Germany, the Netherlands) as a basis for ongoing work.

On Article 13, several member states including the UK supported the principle of access to water, but raised issues of subsidiarity. Most member states called for greater flexibility, with some member states remarking that the directive was not the right place to address this issue. Additionally, the UK drew attention to the importance of adhering to World Health Organisation guidance to underpin the proposal.

C02 cars and vans regulation—policy debate

The Council held a policy debate on CO2 emissions from cars and vans (9728/18), with the presidency seeking views on the level of ambition and incentives for low and zero emission vehicles.

Council was divided into four camps; some member states pushed for over 40% reductions in fleet emissions; others, including the UK did not go as far as this group, but pressed for more ambition than the Commission proposal of a 30% reduction. Another group of member states supported the Commission proposal, while others thought that even this was too ambitious, and called for technological neutrality to help incentivise low and zero emission vehicles.

Council conclusions on the EU action plan for the circular economy

The Council adopted conclusions on the circular economy action plan (10221/18). Member states including the UK noted the importance of addressing single use plastics, with Lord Gardiner highlighting activities across the UK in this area.

AOB Items

The following items were also discussed under any other business.

Current legislative proposals

The Commission introduced four new legislative proposals: LIFE programme (9651/18); water post-June Environment Council reuse (9498/18); single use plastics (9465/18); and environmental reporting (9617/18). The Commission pushed for speedy consideration of the single use plastics and environmental reporting proposals in particular. Several member states welcomed the proposals, with particular focus on the plastics proposal.

EU Pollinators Initiative

The Commission introduced the EU pollinators initiative (9744/18). This received support from several member states including the UK.

Management of chemicals and waste post 2020

Council noted the Swedish paper on establishing a high ambition alliance on the management of chemicals and waste (10104/18). This gathered support from a number of member states.

Convention on biological diversity

France introduced their paper on COP15 of the convention on biological diversity, urging member states to increase efforts to meet the targets on limiting biodiversity loss. This was welcomed by the UK among others.

Commission reports on recent international meetings

The Council noted the information provided by the Commission, Poland and Germany on several international meetings including EU for Galapagos, Ministerial on climate action (MoCA), and the ninth Petersberg climate dialogue. A small number of member states intervened to support EU climate leadership and ambition. The Commission welcomed their support, and noted that with the recently agreed renewable energy and energy efficiency targets, the EU would de facto be in a position to reduce its emissions by 45% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.
C0₂ from heavy duty vehicles
The Commission presented their proposal for C0₂ emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles (8922/18), and called for agreement on the file before the end of the European Parliamentary term.

Paris agreement as an essential clause in EU agreements
France presented a proposal in relation to the Paris agreement and EU co-operation and political dialogue agreements, or in the absence of these, trade agreements. There was some discussion between member states and the Commission, and it was noted that further careful consideration of the proposal would be needed.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE
Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price): In February, the Government announced the establishment of the Independent Medicines and Medical Devices Safety Review. Baroness Cumberlege is in the process of conducting the review into what happened in each of the cases of primodos, sodium valproate and surgical mesh, including whether the processes pursued to date have been sufficient and satisfactory, and to make recommendations on what should happen in future.

Baroness Cumberlege has reported to the Department of Health and Social Care an early finding of her review relating to surgical mesh. Following a number of engagement meetings with patients, she has concluded that there should be a pause without delay in the use of surgically inserted mesh to treat prolapse and the use of tape or slings to treat stress urinary incontinence. They have concluded that this should be done through implementation of a high vigilance programme of restricted practice. They have advised that this approach will allow the NHS to put in place a consistent, high-quality service that adequately meets the conditions set out by Baroness Cumberlege. Both the chief medical officer and Baroness Cumberlege agree that we should institute a pause in the use of vaginally inserted mesh to treat prolapse and the use of tape or slings to treat stress urinary incontinence. They have concluded that this should be done through implementation of a high vigilance programme of restricted practice. The Department has accepted Baroness Cumberlege's recommendation, and the advice from the chief medical officer and senior clinicians.

NHS England is now working with other agencies in the system to implement the pause quickly and safely. A clinical advisory group is being established to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to give effect to the high vigilance programme. NHS England is now working with other agencies in the system to implement the pause quickly and safely. A clinical advisory group is being established to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to give effect to the high vigilance programme. NHS England is now working with other agencies in the system to implement the pause quickly and safely. A clinical advisory group is being established to ensure that appropriate measures are put in place to give effect to the high vigilance programme. NHSE will be writing to providers imminently.

NHS England and NHS Improvement will ensure that provider medical directors and nurse directors are equipped with timely advice and guidance to ensure that clinicians can support patients to make clear decisions about their treatment.

The Department will work with Baroness Cumberlege and senior clinicians in the NHS to act with pace on this decision. The Department is very grateful to Baroness Cumberlege and her review team for listening to the voice of patients and for intervening on their behalf, and to the chief medical officer and senior clinicians for their further advice and commitment to putting in place safe and effective changes for patients.

[HCWS840]
Written Statement

Wednesday 11 July 2018

HOME DEPARTMENT

National DNA Database Strategy Board

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): My noble Friend the Minister of State, Home Office (Baroness Williams of Trafford) has today made the following written statement:

I am pleased to announce that the national DNA database strategy board annual report for 2016-17 is being published today. This report has been expanded to cover the national fingerprints database in addition to the national DNA database (NDNAD) to reflect the extension of the remit of the strategy board.

James Vaughan, temporary chair of the FIND strategy board, has presented the annual report of the national DNA database to the Home Secretary. Publication of the report is a statutory requirement under section 63AB(7) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 as inserted by 24 of the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

The report shows the important contribution that the NDNAD and the national fingerprint databases make to supporting policing and solving crimes. I am grateful to the strategy board for its commitment to fulfilling its statutory functions.

The report is being laid before the House and copies will be available from the Vote Office.

[HCWS843]
Written Statements
Thursday 12 July 2018

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr Philip Hammond): A meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) will be held in Brussels on 13 July 2018. The Council will discuss the following:

Early morning session

The Eurogroup President will brief the Council on the outcomes of the 12 July meeting of the Eurogroup, and the European Commission will provide an update on the current economic situation in the EU.

VAT: generalised reverse charge mechanism and e-publications

The Council will hold an exchange of views on proposals to allow member states to temporarily apply a VAT generalised reverse charge mechanism, and proposals to allow member states to apply non-standard rates of VAT to e-publications.

Current financial services legislative proposals

The Austrian presidency will provide an update on current legislative proposals in the field of financial services.

Presidency work programme

The Austrian presidency will present its work programme on economic and financial matters for July to December 2018, followed by an exchange of views.

June European Council follow-up

The Council will hold an exchange of views on the follow-up to the European Council of 28 and 29 June 2018.

G20 meeting

The Council will be invited to approve the EU terms of reference for the G20 meeting of finance ministers in Buenos Aires on 21 and 22 July.

Pensions Cold Calling Ban

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Glen): I have today laid before Parliament a ministerial statement to set out Government progress on the ban on pensions cold calling, as required under the Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018.

Pensions cold calling is an important and complex issue. Pensions scams can have devastating consequences and cold calling is the most common method used to initiate pensions scams, so the Government have taken the time to ensure the ban works for consumers. The Government will imminently publish a consultation seeking views on a set of draft regulations to ban pensions cold calling. Once we have considered all responses to the consultation, in the autumn we intend to lay regulations under the affirmative procedure and subject to parliamentary approval bring the regulations into force as soon as possible thereafter.

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Media Matters

The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Jeremy Wright): Having taken over as the Secretary of State with responsibility for media public interest cases, I have reviewed the process regarding the proposed merger between 21st Century Fox (21CF) and Sky Plc (Sky). I am content that DCMS and the relevant parties have ensured a scrupulously clear, fair and transparent process and I can now therefore inform the House of the final decisions made by my predecessor as Secretary of State. These decisions were made in a quasi-judicial capacity.

On 5 June, Official Report, column 194, the previous Secretary of State made a statement to the House in which he set out his decision in relation to the proposed merger.

He announced that, having considered the Competition and Markets Authority’s (CMA) report, he agreed with their findings on the public interest grounds and their finding that undertakings to divest Sky News to The Walt Disney Company (Disney) or to an alternative suitable buyer could potentially remedy the public interest concerns identified.

Following the completion of discussions with the parties, on 19 June he published a consultation on the undertakings offered by 21 CF along with new undertakings offered by Disney for the divestment of Sky News to Disney and several associated documents.

We received five responses to the consultation, which closed on 4 July. These responses will be published today on the DCMS website, along with the Government’s response to the consultation.

Having considered the responses to the consultation, the previous Secretary of State agreed with the parties a clarificatory change to Disney’s undertakings and changes to the associated brand licensing agreement. In response to specific concerns raised by respondents, he also agreed that where appropriate the Secretary of State will consult with the CMA in relation to these undertakings and will publish the formal written advice given by the CMA. I am content to confirm this position.

The final version of the undertakings have been published along with the other relevant documents on the DCMS website.

The publication of the undertakings marks the final stage of the public interest consideration of this case. It is right that Ofcom, the CMA and my Department have taken such care in ensuring the bid is properly and effectively scrutinised. It is now a matter for the Sky shareholders to decide whether to accept 21 CF’s bid.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice): The Agriculture and Fisheries Council will take place on 16 July in Brussels.
As the provisional agenda stands, the main agricultural item will be a presentation by the Commission on the common agricultural policy (CAP) post 2020, followed by an exchange of views. Council will discuss three regulations during this item: a regulation on CAP strategic plans; a regulation on financing, management and monitoring of the CAP; and a regulation on common market organisation of agricultural products.

There will also be a presentation by the presidency on its work programme.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

British Council Annual Report

The Minister for Asia and the Pacific (Mark Field): Copies of the British Council’s annual report and accounts for the 2017-18 financial year have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The British Council is the UK’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities and it makes a significant contribution to projecting British values overseas. In doing so it makes a lasting difference to the UK’s security, prosperity and influence. It is the world’s leading cultural relations organisation, reaching over 758 million people in over 100 countries in 2017-18. This included 14 million face-to-face participants in British Council programmes, 42 million customers using British Council digital social media and learning products and 19 million visitors to British Council exhibitions. It is a significant driver of UK soft power.

The Council received £168 million grant-in-aid from the FCO in 2017-18. The FCO is committed to continuing its support of the British Council’s excellent work. The FCO has protected the British Council’s budget and has increased its overall grant over the current spending review period. It has also recently agreed to provide additional funding in this period specifically to support the British Council’s work in Europe and in the developed world.

The report can also be found at the British Council’s website www.britishcouncil.org.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

The Minister for Europe and the Americas (Sir Alan Duncan): The FAC will be chaired by the High Representative of the European Union (HRVP), Federica Mogherini. The meeting will be held in Brussels. The FAC will discuss current affairs, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), the Eastern Partnership and Libya. UK attendance is still to be confirmed.

DPRK

Ministers will discuss developments on the Korean peninsula, including the summit between President Trump and Kim Jong Un in Singapore on 12 June. The UK continues to view economic and political pressure as the best leverage to keep Kim Jong Un engaged in negotiations with the US and to ultimately achieve the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. We will work with partners to ensure the EU remains united in its support for US diplomatic efforts and continues to maintain pressure on the DPRK until it takes concrete steps to denuclearise.

Libya

Libya will be on the agenda for the first time since January. Ministers will discuss the United Nations (UN)-led political process, and ongoing efforts to create the conditions for credible elections before the end of the year, in line with the UN action plan. We will continue to emphasise the need for Libyan leaders to agree on an appropriate package of political, economic and security measures in order to ensure that elections are credible and enjoy broad support. The discussions are also likely to cover recent events in the eastern “Oil Crescent” area of Libya, and the need to ensure that oil facilities remain under the control of the legitimate Libyan National Oil Corporation. We will underline the need for continued united international support for a political solution in Libya. The discussion may also focus on the need to tackle the shared challenge of migration, including how to protect the most vulnerable from exploitation.

Eastern Partnership

Ministers will discuss the Eastern Partnership ahead of the October ministerial. The FAC will assess progress against the “20 Deliverables for 2020” which were set out in 2016. The UK supports the objectives of the Eastern Partnership and will continue to do so after leaving the EU. The UK’s priorities within the “20 Deliverables for 2020” include security, good governance and economic development, underpinned by effective use of strategic communication. The UK will reiterate these priorities at the FAC and call for greater co-operation between member states in countering hybrid threats and disinformation.

Council conclusions

The FAC is expected to adopt conclusions on the International Criminal Court (ICC).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Serious and Organised Crime: HMI of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services Report

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): The National Crime Agency was established to lead the fight against serious and organised crime. It has the power to task other law enforcement partners and a capability, with local to international reach, to disrupt the impact of serious and organised crime on the UK.

This is the fourth HMIC inspection of the NCA. It examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the national tasking and co-ordination process and the related arrangements of the strategic governance groups.

This report has been published today and I will place a copy of the report in the Library of the House. I have asked HMIC to publish this report on my behalf and it is available online at www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk.
The report finds that the NCA has efficient and effective practices in place to support its role in the tasking, co-ordination and governance of serious and organised crime. Current arrangements are generally working well, although there are areas in which the NCA, alongside police and other law enforcement agencies need to improve as set out in the 11 recommendations they made.

It is for the director general to respond to these recommendations, in line with the requirements of the Crime and Courts Act 2013.

[HCWS849]

Immigration

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Following a recent strike by university lecturers, a number of hon. Members have raised concerns about the position of migrant workers who engage in legal strike action and whether this affects their immigration status.

It is not the Government’s policy to prevent migrant workers from engaging in legal strike action and, to date, I am not aware of any case where a migrant worker has had their leave curtailed, or been removed, as a result of having engaged in legal industrial action. However, to put the matter beyond doubt, I will be making changes to the guidance and immigration rules for migrant workers (under the tier 2 and 5 immigration routes) and their sponsors.

The specific change will add legal strike action to the list of exceptions to the rule on absences from employment without pay for migrant workers. It will make it clear that there will be no immigration consequences for any migrant worker who takes part in legal strike action in the same way that a migrant worker is not disadvantaged if they take maternity or paternity leave.

This will ensure that non-EEA migrants can take part in legal industrial action along with their British and European colleagues.

The changes to the sponsor guidance will be made shortly and amendments to the immigration rules will be made at the next available opportunity in the autumn.

[HCWS848]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures:
March-May 2018

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of his TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

The level of information provided will always be subject to slight variations based on operational advice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPIM notices in respect of British citizens (as of 31 May 2018)</td>
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<tr>
<td>TPIM notices extended (during the reporting period)</td>
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The TPIM Review Group (TRG) keeps every TPIM notice under regular and formal review. The TRG meetings took place on 4, 6, 11, 12 and 14 December 2017. The next round of TRGs took place during March 2018.

[HCWS850]

Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures:
December 2017-February 2018

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Sajid Javid): Section 19(1) of the Terrorism Prevention and Investigation Measures Act 2011 (the Act) requires the Secretary of State to report to Parliament as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of every relevant three-month period on the exercise of his TPIM powers under the Act during that period.

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[HCWS851]

JUSTICE

Justice Update

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Lucy Frazer): I wish to inform the House that I have decided to lay an amendment to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 to bring immigration matters for unaccompanied and separated children into scope of legal aid.

Under current legislation, legal aid is available in all asylum cases—for all age groups—and immigration cases where someone is challenging a detention decision. Legal aid for other immigration matters is available via
the exceptional case funding (ECF) scheme, which is intended to ensure legal aid is accessible in all cases where there is a risk of breach of human rights.

Following a judicial review brought by the Children’s Society, we have examined both the evidence presented as part of the case and our data on applications for funding. Based on the distinct nature of the cohort in question, and of our data regarding them, I have decided to bring these cases into the scope of legal aid to ensure access to justice.

The amendment will be laid in due course following discussion across Government and with external stakeholders.

[HCWS853]

WORK AND PENSIONS

Child Maintenance Compliance and Arrears Strategy

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Justin Tomlinson): Later today I intend to lay the draft Child Support (Miscellaneous Amendment) Regulations 2018 detailed in “The Child Maintenance Compliance and Arrears Strategy” consultation response, which will be published on gov.uk later today and the primary effect of which will be the introduction of new powers to:

- Vary a child maintenance liability by calculating an assumed income from certain high-value assets.
- Extend our existing ability to deduct maintenance and arrears directly from bank accounts, to include joint and business accounts.
- Prevent a paying parent from holding or obtaining a passport where all other enforcement action has proved ineffective.
- Provide clarity for families about the treatment of the historic arrears that built up on child support (CSA) cases, by:
  - Seeking representations from clients in cases with non-paying CSA debt about whether we should make a last attempt to collect the debt, where it is cost-effective to do so. Where no representations are received, or collection of the debt is not possible, the debt may be written off.
  - Writing off non-paying debt where a collection attempt is not cost-effective, and informing clients of this.
  - Writing off non-paying debt under £65 without notifying clients.
  - Enable debt subject to sequestration (Scottish insolvency) to be written off when the sequestration expires. This technical amendment will apply to both CSA and CMS cases, as sequestration causes this debt to become legally uncollectable.

These draft regulations are subject to the affirmative procedure and I look forward to discussing them with colleagues in due course.

[HCWS846]
Petitions
Wednesday 4 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS
Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Thirsk and Malton,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to withdraw the draft guidance and the consultation, until it has put in place an accessible and workable complaints procedure and further has consulted with home educating parents, as it has with Local Authorities, what the contents should include.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mrs Anne Main.]

[002180]

The petition of residents of Bridgwater and West Somerset,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Kevin Hollinrake.]

[002181]

The petition of residents of Hertford and Stortford,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Mark Prisk.]

[002182]

The petition of residents of Erith and Thamesmead,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Teresa Pearce.]

[002185]
The petition of residents of Keighley,
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by John Grogan.]  

P002186

The petition of residents of Maldon Constituency,
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr John Whittingdale.]  

P002187

The petition of residents of Stafford,
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Jeremy Lefroy.]  

P002191

The petition of residents of Stockton North constituency,
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Alex Cunningham.]  

P002172
Petitions

Thursday 5 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Redditch constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rachel Maclean.]

The petition of residents of Taunton Deane,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rebecca Pow.]

The petition of residents of North Somerset constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc./
Petitions

Monday 9 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and the consultation

The petition of residents of Wolverhampton South East constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.

[P002197]

The petition of residents of Bexleyheath and Crayford Constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sir David Evennett.]

[P002198]
Petition

Tuesday 10 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITION
Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and consultation

The petition of residents of Bristol East Constituency,
Declare that the “Home Education - Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Kerry McCarthy.]
Wednesday 11 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS
Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and consultation

The petition of residents of Somerton and Frome Constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by David Warburton.]  

The petition of residents of West Dorset Constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement

and the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Sir Oliver Letwin.]  

The petition of residents of Yeovil Constituency,

Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated; further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Marcus Fysh.]  

[Presented by Marcus Fysh.]
Petitions

Thursday 12 July 2018

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Home Education: draft guidance and consultation

The petition of residents of residents of Stone Constituency:
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Antoinette Sandbach.]

[P002209]

The petition of residents of Cheltenham Constituency:
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc. / [Presented by "Bill William Cash."]

[P002208]

The petition of residents of Eddisbury Constituency:
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by John Penrose.]

[P002202]

The petition of residents of Weston-super-Mare,
Declare that the “Home Education—Call for Evidence and revised DfE guidance” has been written following significant consultation with local authorities and no consultation whatsoever with the home education community; further that the consultation is consequently for little more than show as an intention to implement the content has already been stated: further that it seeks to encourage local authorities to breach the ECHR Article 8 and the GDPR; and further that the report provides no accessible means for a parent to address ultra vires behaviour by their local authority, where many of those authorities already act routinely in an ultra vires manner.

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And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Antoinette Sandbach.]

[P002200]
OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Alexandra Hospital Redditch Urgent Care Centre

The petition of residents of Redditch County.

Declares that as part of the consultation into Acute services in Worcestershire in 2017 which saw overnight paediatric care centralised at the Worcestershire Royal Hospital, the local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) promised to bring forward plans for a GP-led urgent care centre in Redditch; further that was understood to be an essential part of the proposed model for Acute services which was brought before the West Midlands Clinical Senate and the boards of the three local CCGs; however there is still no timetable for delivery of the urgent care centre; further that once the children’s A&E was centralised to Worcester, residents were told there would be an urgent care service for under 16-year-old very sick children provided at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch; and further that would give parents peace of mind that their loved ones would be assessed, in a place familiar to them, especially for those who have difficulty travelling to Worcester.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to press the local health authorities in Redditch and Worcester to publish their detailed plans for the implementation of the said urgent care centre.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Rachel Maclean, Official Report, 23 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 956.]

Observations from the Minister for Health (Stephen Barclay):

The proposed reconfigurations under the acute service review took place under emergency measures over the previous two years (Maternity, Paediatrics and Acute Surgery). Our understanding is that the only aspect that has not yet been implemented is the urgent care centre proposal for the Alexandra hospital site in Redditch.

South Worcestershire CCG is currently working through the detail of the national guidance that has been issued with regard to urgent care centres, prior to commissioning a revised model for the Alexandra hospital site. The CCG is aiming for the centre to be open by December 2018. We would urge the CCG to publish any additional plans for implementation as soon as is possible, to ensure the local population are kept up to date with plans and progress.

The CCGs are currently in the process of scoping out a range of options for the operational approach to the development of the UTC, including how it best interfaces with other local services such as the primary care out of hours services also based at the Alexandra Hospital and Neighbourhood Teams within the local community.

Rather than children being seen by A&E professionals, the UTC at the Alexandra Hospital will provide access to a primary care professional who will be experienced in treating a broad range of child health conditions. If a child was poorly enough to require admission to hospital, then they would need to be transferred to either Worcester or Birmingham.

For clarification, urgent treatment centres encapsulate urgent care centres; there has been a change of terminology designed to prevent confusion. More information on this change can be found here: https://www.england.nhs.uk/urgent-emergency-care/urgent-treatment-centres/.
Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 5 July 2018

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugee Family Reunion

The following is an extract from the response by the Minister for Immigration to the debate on Refugee Family Reunion on 21 June 2018.

Caroline Nokes: We are on track to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria and a further 30,000 children and families from the wider Middle East and North Africa—MENA—region. [Official Report, 21 June 2018, Vol. 643, c. 553.]

Letter of correction from Caroline Nokes:

An error has been identified in the response I made to the debate on Refugee Family Reunion. The correct response should have been:

Caroline Nokes: We are on track to resettle 20,000 refugees from Syria and a further 3,000 children and families from the wider Middle East and North Africa—MENA—region.

DEFENCE

Counter-Daesh Update

The following is an extract from questions on a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 July 2018.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State accept that our principal allies on the ground in Syria have been Kurdish-led? Does he share my concern that, having helped to suppress and eliminate Daesh in Syria, those Kurdish-led forces may now find themselves under attack by Turkey, a country with an ambivalent record toward both Islamist extremism on the one hand and Russia on the other? What will we do if we find our Kurdish allies are attacked by our so-called NATO ally?

Gavin Williamson: We have worked incredibly closely with the Syrian defence forces over a period of time, as have other coalition allies. We are working closely with the United States and France to get a dialogue going between the Syrian defence forces and Turkey to ensure that there is no conflict of the form that my right hon. Friend raises. [Official Report, 3 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 196.]

Letter of correction from Gavin Williamson:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis).

The correct response should have been:

Gavin Williamson: We have worked incredibly closely with the Syrian democratic forces over a period of time, as have other coalition allies. We are working closely with the United States and France to get a dialogue going between the Syrian democratic forces and Turkey to ensure that there is no conflict of the form that my right hon. Friend raises.

The following is a further extract from questions on a statement by the Secretary of State for Defence on 3 July 2018.

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): The Kurdish people fought with some of the most bravery and effect to defend their local populations against the cruelties of Daesh. What are the UK Government now doing to protect the Kurdish people of Iraq and Syria from being attacked by the Governments of those two countries and, indeed, by the Government of Turkey?

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work very closely with, especially, the Iraqi Government and the Turkish Government to make sure that we have sensible and pragmatic solutions. We have always had a very strong relationship with the Kurds, especially in Afghanistan. We have a very good relationship with the SDF, which is both Kurdish and Arab. We will continue to work to try to ensure, especially in Syria, that the SDF is an integral part of the solution for that country going forward. [Official Report, 3 July 2018, Vol. 644, c. 201.]

Letter of correction from Gavin Williamson:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin).

The correct response should have been:

Gavin Williamson: We continue to work very closely with, especially, the Iraqi Government and the Turkish Government to make sure that we have sensible and pragmatic solutions. We have always had a very strong relationship with the Kurds, especially in Iraq. We have a very good relationship with the SDF, which is both Kurdish and Arab. We will continue to work to try to ensure, especially in Syria, that the SDF is an integral part of the solution for that country going forward.
Ministerial Correction

Monday 9 July 2018

TRANSPORT

Transport Expenditure: London and the North-east

The following is an extract from Transport questions on 5 July 2018.

Grahame Morris: The Transport Select Committee has found that a disproportionate amount of transport funding is being spent in the capital, at the expense of the regions. What steps will the Minister take to close the gap and to specifically address issues highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr Hepburn), including the “Safe A19” campaign, the Seaton Lane A19 junction improvement and ensuring that east Durham gets a rail halt at Horden?

Joseph Johnson: The Government are investing substantial sums in the north—£13 billion in the five years to 2020—and in the next control period for rail, we will invest £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine upgrade alone. The hon. Gentleman, I am afraid, is factually wrong to say that Government investment per head in London and the south exceeds that of similar investment in the north. IPA analysis shows that for the three years to 2021, the north will receive £1,039 per head, which is £10 more than similar figures for the south of England.


Letter of correction from Joseph Johnson:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to the hon. Member for Easington (Grahame Morris).

The correct response should have been:

Joseph Johnson: The Government are investing substantial sums in the north—£13 billion in the five years to 2020—and in the next control period for rail, we will invest £2.9 billion on the trans-Pennine upgrade alone. The hon. Gentleman, I am afraid, is factually wrong to say that Government investment per head in London and the south exceeds that of similar investment in the north. IPA analysis shows that for the four years to 2020-21, the north will receive £1,039 per head, which is £10 more than similar figures for the south of England.
Ministerial Correction

Tuesday 10 July 2018

TRANSPORT

National Policy Statements: Airports

The following is an extract from the debate on National Policy Statement: Airports on 25 June 2018.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Government are committed to protecting and expanding these domestic routes, increasing them from eight to at least 14, and 15% of them will serve domestic flights to deliver even more opportunities for greater connectivity across the UK, benefiting passengers and businesses. [Official Report, 25 June 2018, Vol. 643, c. 718.]

Letter of correction from Jesse Norman:
An error has been identified in my winding-up speech in the National Policy Statement: Airports debate. The correct statement should have been:

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Jesse Norman): The Government are committed to protecting and expanding these domestic routes, increasing them from eight to at least 14, and about 15% of new slots will serve domestic flights to deliver even more opportunities for greater connectivity across the UK, benefiting passengers and businesses.
Ministerial Corrections

Thursday 12 July 2018

DEFENCE

Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Fleet Support Ships

The following is an extract from Defence questions on 9 July 2018.

Andrew Bridgen: Will the Minister confirm that any weaponry installed on the fleet support ships will be procured from British companies?

Guto Bebb: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The weapons element of any ship that is not designated as a warship will be procured from the United Kingdom and fixed on to the platforms in the United Kingdom.


Letter of correction from Guto Bebb:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for North West Leicestershire (Andrew Bridgen).

The correct response should have been:

Guto Bebb: The weapons element of any ship that is not designated as a warship will be supplied to meet that ship’s specific requirement and fixed on to the platforms in the United Kingdom.

TRANSPORT

Transport Infrastructure

The following is an extract from Transport questions on 5 July 2018.

Mark Menzies (Fylde) (Con): I have a wonderful piece of transport infrastructure in my constituency called Blackpool airport. Will the Secretary of State tell me what steps will be taken to ensure that with a third runway at Heathrow, we will see improved connectivity to my part of the north-west?

Chris Grayling: This is why I am committed to saying that the 15% of slots set aside for regional connections are set in stone. We are not going to see those suddenly disappear from 15% to 10% to 5%, with routes diverted elsewhere. The expansion of Heathrow is a really important part of delivering improvements right around the United Kingdom, and I am committed to making sure that happens.


Letter of correction from Chris Grayling:

An error has been identified in the response I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mark Menzies).

The correct response should have been:

Chris Grayling: As per my previous response to the hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury), I am committed to saying that around 15% of slots set aside for regional connections are set in stone. We are not going to see those suddenly disappear from 15% to 10% to 5%, with routes diverted elsewhere. The expansion of Heathrow is a really important part of delivering improvements right around the United Kingdom, and I am committed to making sure that happens.